



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

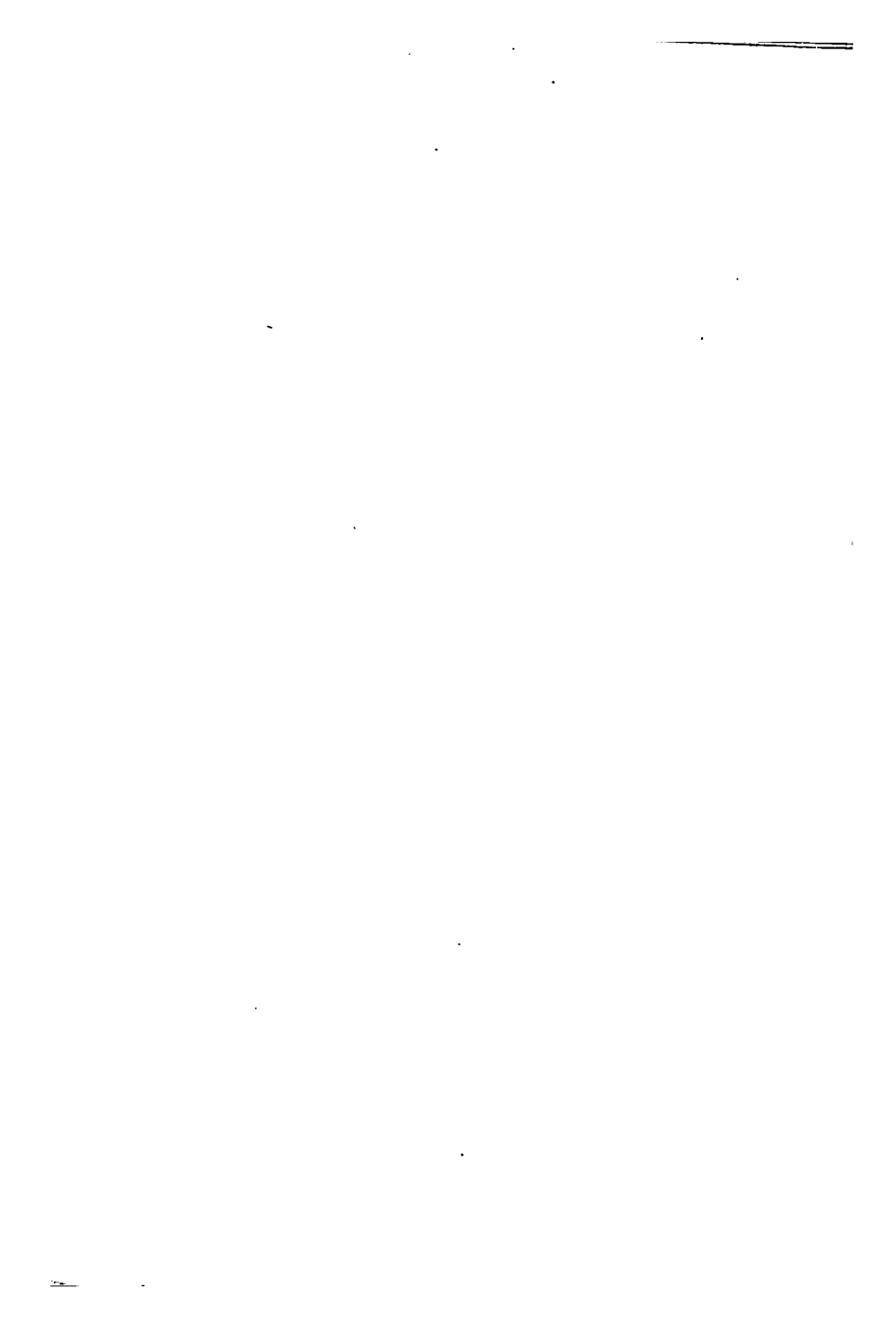
About Google Book Search

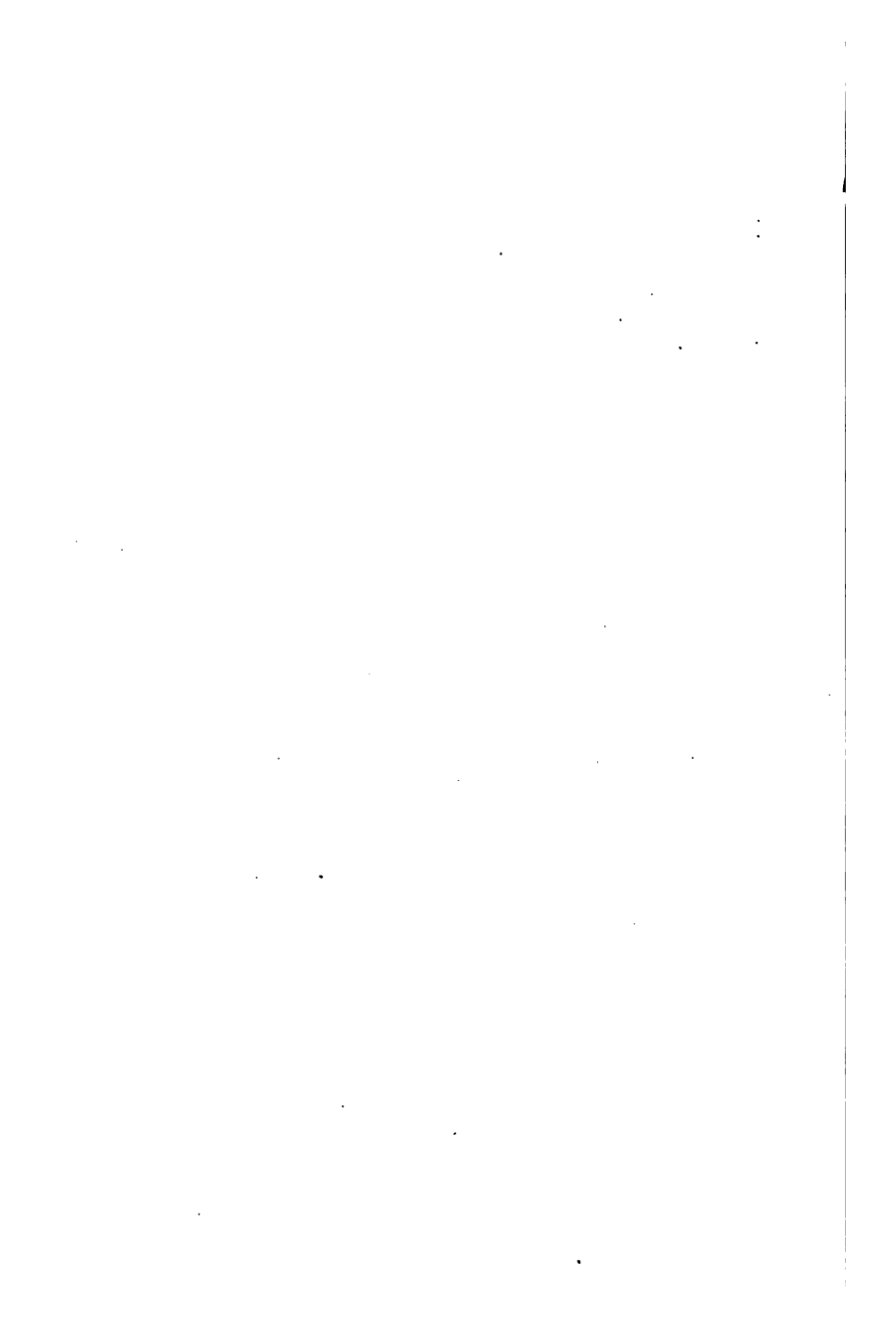
Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>

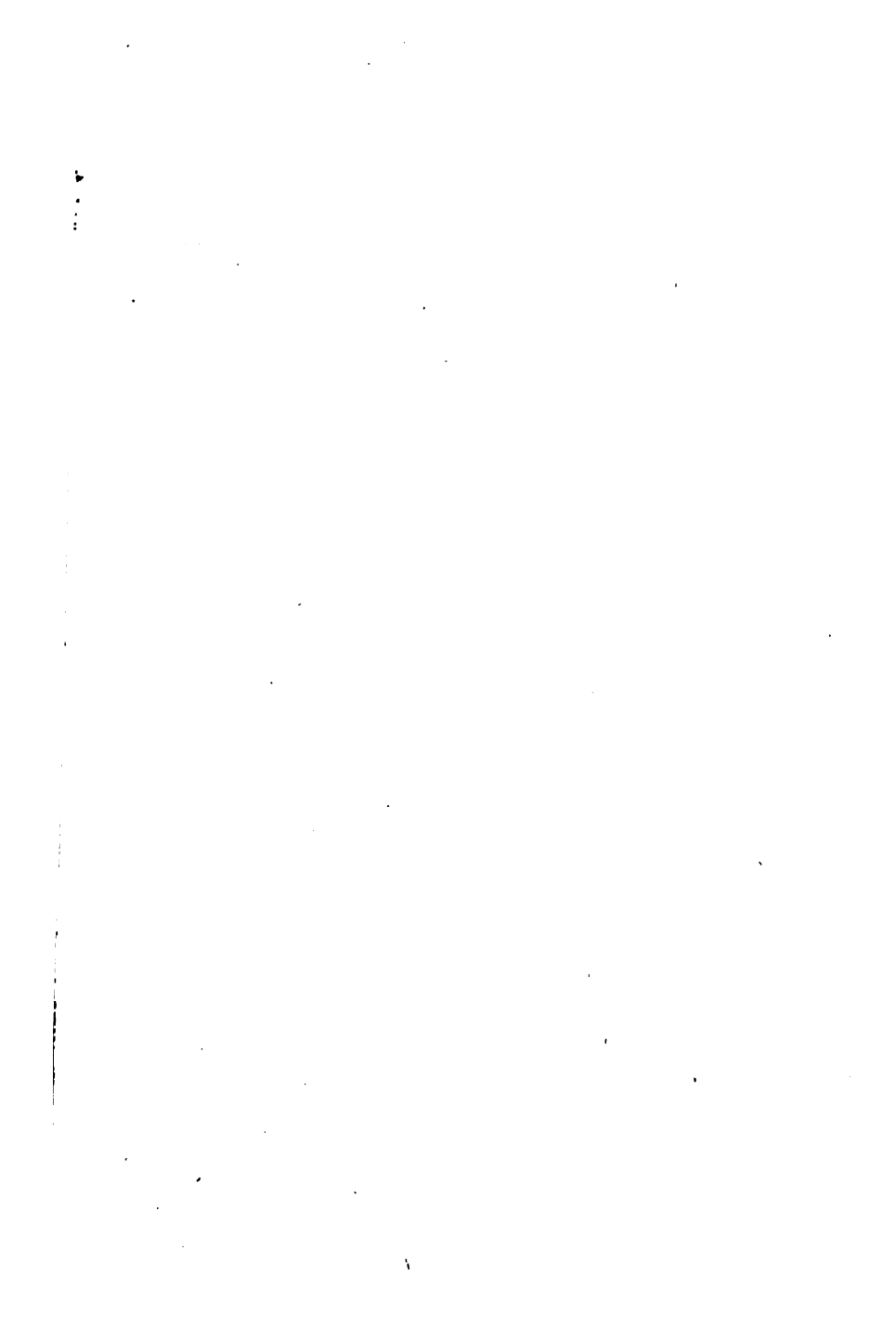


600057935Z







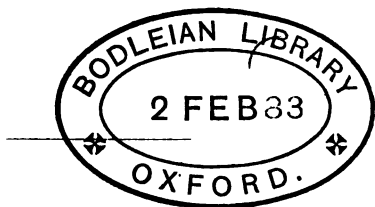




CLARE WELSMAN.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "PANSIES AND ASPHODEL," ETC.



London :
REMINGTON AND CO.,
NEW BOND STREET, W.

1883.

[All Rights Reserved.]

251. g. 509

CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE.
I.	Sunday Morning	4
II.	Apollo	18
III.	Miss Alwyn	25
IV.	An Escape	37
V.	The Quarterly Meeting	51
VI.	A Wreath of Azaleas	65
VII.	Professor Newman's Lecture	77
VIII.	Norman Smith	86
IX.	At Mrs. Miller's	91
X.	Miss Alwyn's Visitors	102
XI.	An Offer of Marriage	114
XII.	Launched	133
XIII.	A Family Visit... ..	140
XIV.	Hetty's Fortune	145
XV.	Gulielma	150
XVI.	Maria Bevington makes a Discovery... ..	157
XVII.	Requiescat in Pace	167
XVIII.	Carew's New Manager	171
XIX.	Floribella	187
XX.	A Commission... ..	196
XXI.	Aut Wiedersehen	208
XXII.	At Barham-on-Sea	218
XXIII.	"White, Matchless Queen of the World"	229
XXIV.	A Clue	236
XXV.	The Portrait	245
XXVI.	In the Storm	253
XXVII.	Clare Welsman's Mother	264
XXVIII.	The Old House	278
XXIX.	"Nun will euch Hülfe bringen der gnadenreiche Tod"	289

CLARE WELSMAN.

BARHAM-ON-SEA is a busy seaside town on the English coast, little frequented by visitors, except those who come from the immediate neighbourhood. It differs scarcely at all from other places of the kind in its outward characteristics. There is a fine sea, and a little stone pier, with a harbour for the fishing boats which abound at Barham, and for any pleasure boats or yachts that may chance to come there; but these last are rarely to be seen as they are generally attracted by gayer and more fashionable watering-places. There is a town band which plays to the inhabitants regularly twice a week on the lower esplanade and now and then on the cliff, and is available for local celebrations of all sorts, from a flower show in the grounds of some

neighbouring magnate, to the benefit of a strolling actress at the town hall. There are a few bathing machines, and some donkeys for hire on the sands in the height of the summer, and there is a whole fleet of fishing boats with picturesque rich brown sails, and a life-boat lies ready in the harbour to help them in time of need. Weather-beaten fishermen stand about the quays waiting for the tide, or steer triumphantly in through the narrow opening of the harbour with their holds filled high with fish, or turn out warily at turn of the tide, sometimes, alas, never to come home.

The town stands circled round the bay, on a low cliff chiefly, though some of the houses are built beneath its shelter on the beach, and flights of stone steps creep up the cliff's face, making easy the ascent and descent. The road winds up by a longer way, and runs across the top of the cliff in front of the long line of houses, leaving a space of green turf between them and the

esplanade that fronts the sea. On this green space stands the most remarkable thing in Barham. It is the marble bust of a young man, and is raised upon a tall pedestal. The head is massive and well formed, and the thick hair sits gracefully round it. The face is full of character and sweetness; but in spite of the energy that breathes from it the eyes are sad and look out appealingly, as the eyes of a man fated and unfortunate. Underneath the bust there is a tablet with the words

CLARE WELSMAN,
Sculptor,

carved upon it, and if you look more narrowly you may see the name repeated in fancy lettering in one corner of the marble.

CHAPTER I.

SUNDAY MORNING.

ON a certain Sunday in July the inhabitants of Stokeland were rejoicing in the first clear sunshine they had seen for a fortnight. There had been watery gleams of sunlight once or twice between the showers; but June had been a wet and gloomy month, and the weather had not yet settled down to its wonted July splendour. Now there seemed some hope of real summer, and the farmers were almost more aggrieved than if the sunshine had not come at all, for the fields were nearly all cleared, and the air laden with a scent of heated hay trying to the bucolic temper. But to the world in general the golden day was a new delight, and many a thankful heart was taking its way towards a visible sanctuary through the Sabbath stillness.

First came the Dissenters, for the Stoke-

land chapels begin at half-past ten, and already the organ in the Congregational Church was distinctly audible playing in the worshippers. Before the chapel-goers have well left the streets the church bells have summoned the vicar's hearers to the old church in the centre of the town, and another stream of men and women, and children has begun to flow towards the churchyard gates which stand wide open. And the children are no inconsiderable portion of the crowd, some of them being taken with their parents as a matter of convenience, and some from principle; most, however, would feel aggrieved if left at home, the occasion being unequalled for the display of best frocks, and caps, and shoes, and jackets, besides putting them on a level with grown-up people, and giving a pleasing sense of superiority over those left behind in the nursery. There is also another congregation gathering at the western end of the town, and one by one, or in family groups, they pass the church-goers. Quaint,

old-world figures, many of them, with the garments of a bygone generation, and a quiet formal air, contrasting sharply with the gaily dressed, modern crowd of ordinary worshippers. They are wending their way towards Brook Street, and all disappear through a little iron gate in the high wall that rises on the right hand. We will pass in with them, for we have to do with some of these.

On week days, excepting on Wednesdays, the gate is closely shut and screened with a wooden door, so that the passer-by finds it impossible to satisfy his curiosity as to what lies within; but to-day gate and door are thrown back, and a green stretch of turf is visible, with trees here and there, and little nameless mounds beneath them. There are some flower beds to your left as you pass along, and at this time of the year you may see sweet peas, and ruddy nasturtiums, and honesty blooming there, and a sweet scent of mignonette hangs about the place. Indeed

there is no quieter or more fragrant spot in Stokeland than this—the Friends' Meeting House. Within the building itself all is neatness and repose. The walls are coloured a cool bluish grey, the seats are plain wooden forms, but made in the most comfortable fashion of which a wooden form is capable, and cushioned with pale drab. Two rows of raised seats occupy the upper end, one rather higher than the other, and this is called in Quaker parlance the Ministers' Gallery; but all the rest are on a level, standing in two blocks with a pathway down the middle.

The men sit on one side and the women on the other, and to-day the Ministers' seat is empty, for there is no regular preacher at Stokeland. There are not many worshippers in all—perhaps about forty people; but there is considerable variety among them, and if you are a reflective observer, you may trace the history of Quakerism in this small company. One of the most prominent figures is that of Thomas Lamb, who sits

under the gallery on the raised seat facing the meeting, and is an Elder. He is clothed in drab from head to foot, and is a relic of the uncompromising, primitive school of thought. Music and singing, and tasteful dress, and the harmonious arts of life, and all pageantry and splendour are abhorrent to him, and his days are spent in weighing out sugar, and tea, and coffee in an orderly and sedate manner, and in attending meetings. That little low-roofed shop in the market place is Thomas Lamb's, and it is a popular resort, for you get good weight there, and its master's theological opinions do not interfere with his keen judgment of quality and quantity. The travellers frequenting Stokeland have nicknamed him "Old Thee and Thou," but there is not one of them that can take him in.

Facing him sits the Allens, and they fill one form and overflow to the next, for Hannah Allen has only one little girl beside her on the women's side, and all the rest of her

seven children are boys and sit with their father. George Allen marks a middle period in Quakerism, for he does not accurately belong to the old or the new order of things. He uses the "plain language," but he also addresses non-members in the ordinary style of society; he has a conscientious objection to paying tithes, and his silver spoons have occasionally been distrained in consequence, to the great chagrin of the men charged with the office of seizing them, who usually screw up their courage to the occasion by getting drunk, and then proceed to do the State Church's bidding. But then there is a piano in the Allen's house, and in spite of Thomas Lamb, the young Allens play very prettily on that piano, and Mary Eliza Allen, who is a girl of sixteen, sings to its music in a thin, sweet voice, and on Sunday evenings the boys sing hymns with her. At first the mother, that fair, placid woman, in the grey poplin dress, and black silk mantle, and drawn grey bonnet, could not make up her

mind to admit of this startling innovation on the traditions of her family ; but after a time, what with the entreaties of her children, and the example of several families among her most honoured friends, she gave way, or, as she herself phrased it, "felt clear to allow it."

The boy Allens are a somewhat rough-looking tribe, ranging from ten to twenty years of age. They are not gifted with much conversation, except in the family circle, and there is much to be desired in the set of their hair and the style of their clothes ; but they are good, honest lads, all the six, and will not disgrace the family creed. Nay, more, with no extraordinary gifts or graces they will leave their world better than they found it.

The newest type of Quakerism is represented by the family of Geoffrey Thorpe, the banker, who sits midway up the meeting by himself ; not that he has come alone, but because his two fashionably dressed sons.

prefer places nearer the door, by a process of natural selection ; thus typifying their position with regard to the Society, which they are liable to leave at any moment. One of the daughters has left it already, and as a matter of course is exceedingly High Church, and much absorbed in a neighbouring curate ; the other is sitting by her mother—that graceful girl with yellow hair, who wears a cool summer toilette—and she evinces no disposition to desert the faith of her fathers. The Thorpes live on the outskirts of the town, in a mansion of square build, standing in beautiful grounds, and they drive a pair of horses, and visit with the Lord Lieutenant of the county.

On the first form on the women's side sits a widow with her two daughters, one on either hand. She is dressed in rich black silk, and her daughters in pale grey, and in their dress and features there appears evidence of a higher culture than is to be seen in any other group in the meeting house. It

is difficult to describe where the difference lies between them and the rest; all the other ladies are daintily neat in their attire, and these three are not fashionably dressed; but it is certain that they possess a refinement and grace peculiar to themselves. Elizabeth Howe, the mother, has been a widow for seven years, and her elder daughter is now seventeen. She is a sweet-looking woman, and her cares and sorrows have left her face almost without wrinkles. She has had cares and sorrows, for her only son as well as her husband is dead, and she has lost ten thousand pounds by a mine, and her younger daughter, Alicia, is very delicate and at times has been in danger of her life. But Elizabeth Howe's faith is so firmly anchored in the invisible, that things may shake her but cannot loose her hold on the strength of God. Gulielma, the elder girl, is wonderfully like her mother, with the same "still conclusion," in her manner and the pure lily and rose complexion.

Alicia is different altogether, and her slight figure, over-tall for her fifteen years, and her vivid dark face, are of another type and are inherited from a grandmother who was a convert, and admitted to membership shortly before her marriage with John Howe the girls' grandfather. At present Alicia sits staring at Thomas Lamb, and wondering whether it is possible that he has ever felt as she does about anything. For example did he ever enjoy putting on new gloves?—Alicia feeling much inward satisfaction at her own grey kid ones, put on that morning for the first time—did he care about Ann Lamb, that shrivelled yellow old lady in the large Friends' bonnet? How did he make her an offer, and what did she say in answer? Did he ever eat any of his own toffy drops? Would he be pleased if you gave him a rose? She became so lost in the endless speculations involved in these questions, that I am afraid her devotions were not very profitable.

There was a soft sympathetic stillness in

the meeting that morning. No one preached or prayed with an audible voice, but many a devout heart was raising silent petitions. Some lay open for the entrance of the Divine Spirit; waiting, like Samuel in the sanctuary for what the Lord should speak. And the sun shone, and the green branches waved across the windows, and a bird was singing and bees were buzzing in the grateful new warmth.

Elsewhere there was much verbal utterance. The curate at the Old Church was reading about *the* Faith and *the* Church, evidently implying that no other existed save his own. Mr. Knock, at the Baptist Chapel, was preaching immersion with intense conviction and great heat. Mr. Perfect at St. Paul's was discoursing on the state of the lost. The Plymouth Brethren were taking the Lord's Supper in a sitting-room, for their cause was weak in Stokeland, and had just decided to disown a young woman who had begun attending the Baptist Chapel in the

evening. The vicar of St. Saviour's was discoursing on the blessed privilege of confession to a Priest. The Calvinistic minister was impressing the doctrine of Election on the congregation at the Ebenezer Chapel. But untouched by this tumult, the placid company of Friends sat silent before God in the summer morning.

After a time the two principal members shook hands, and there was a gentle rustle of silks, and a sound of footstools pushed back and the congregation filed out, with kindly greetings, into the vestibule and courtyard.

Just then the church and chapel-goers were returning, and among the crowd the slight tall figure of a widow showed conspicuously. She was a woman of about forty-five years of age, with a handsome face and noble bearing, and a boy of fourteen walked beside her.

"There are the Welsmans," cried Gulielma Howe, stopping at the meeting door till they came up, and then crossing over to them.

She and Mrs. Welsman were warm allies in benevolent works of various kinds, but Mrs. Howe and Alicia knew very little of them ; accordingly they followed together, Gulielma and her friend leading the way.

“I wanted to see you, Miss Howe,” said Mrs. Welsman, “for Letty Gibbs has been asking me about you every time I have been there, and I have forgotten to let you know.”

Gulielma promised to call upon the girl, and they went on, deep in kindred topics. They were a striking contrast—Gulielma calm and fair and dovelike—Mrs. Welsman full of a hidden fire and restlessness. Among other things that betray this, is a way she has of clasping her hands together, not carelessly and loosely, but with a long tight pressure that stays the blood and leaves white marks behind—as if she were deprecating some danger.

“I am afraid there is not much hope of poor Letty,” said Gulielma, “she is so

unsteady, and when girls have gone wrong it is so difficult for them to turn back."

"Oh! but they may repent," said Mrs. Welsman, "they may be better at last than some that have never gone astray: be merciful to Letty—be very patient with her, my dear. You have never suffered such temptation—how can you tell what she may suffer? She loves you—I think it is laid upon your soul to help her." She spoke with feverish earnestness, and clasped her hands close with that strange gesture of hers. "Forgive me, if I say too much, but my heart aches for poor Letty, and the unhappy baby."

"I will do all I can, dear Mrs. Welsman," said Gulielma, her sweet face beaming with tender charity. "You are quite right, we must always have faith and try what love can do."

CHAPTER II.

APOLLO.

MRS. WELSMAN was one of the hardest workers in Stokeland in her own way, and she had just come in from a long round of district visiting, and was wet and chilly and tired, for the weather had again turned cold after the thunderstorm of the evening of the previous day, and all that afternoon there had been a drizzling rain. Mrs. Welsman lived in Anchor Street, a very quiet bye-way, running out of Chapel Street, and named after an inn, which had stood there in old times, but had long since been converted into dwelling houses. She was a widow, and had come to Stokeland some years before the date of my story, and had at once entered heart and soul into what is technically called parish work. At first she had attached herself to the Old Church, but after attending

there for a month or two, and finding the level of spiritual life low, and the parish machinery considerably out of gear, she had changed over to the District Church of St. Paul's, and was now the head centre of its various organizations. Nothing could go on satisfactorily without Mrs. Welsman, and she gave liberally to the extent of her ability ; she was also the best collector and money-getter in the whole congregation, and there was no end to her energy and strength. This evening she is not looking her best, there are hard lines in her thin face, and she walks about the dull little house with a drooping, heavy gait. Her one servant comes up the kitchen stairs and takes her wet cloak, and tells her to be sure and change her boots directly.

"You must take more care o' yourself ma'am," says little Mary cheerfully, "and not be righteous overmuch."

Mrs. Welsman smiled wearily.

"Oh ! there is no danger of that, Mary ; I

am not afraid of being too good yet," she said as she plodded upstairs; "where is Master Clare?"

"Down in the harbour, ma'am; I couldn't do with him in the kitchen at all, he was that rampagious."

"What did he do?" asked Mrs. Welsman anxiously.

"He would get hold of my dough, as I was making the cake out of, and said it would just do to make bustes of, and he was going to do a moral of me, and the upshoots of it was I was obliged to send him off to the harbour."

By the "harbour" Mary did not mean a haven for ships, there being no sea within sixty miles of Stokeland, but a wooden structure half-way down the strip of garden behind the house.

"Go and fetch him in, there's a good girl, he will catch cold," said Mrs. Welsman, and Mary ran down the garden, calling! "Master Clare! Master Clare!"

But no answer came, and she was obliged to pick her way among the puddles as far as the summer-house, holding her clean print skirts closely round her, to avoid coming into collision with the wet flowers which bordered the path.

The summer-house was a large building of its kind, and boasted a door and window. Indeed it was an outdoor room, rather than an arbour, and was a favourite resort of Mrs. Welsman's nephew Clare, especially when he had any private scheme on hand.

Mary found the door closed and locked, and had to knock several times before it was opened, and a discontented voice said—

“What do you want? It is not tea-time I'm certain.”

“Oh, Master Clare, what a nasty mess to get yourself into! Come back to the house this minute, do!”

“I'm not quite ready yet, Mary,” answered the boy coaxingly, with a deprecating look at his earthy trousers and sleeves. “Don't

make a fuss, you dear old thing, it will brush off in a minute."

He was a bright-looking lad with clear, honest eyes, and decided features, and now that his face was flushed with exertion and excitement he looked a handsome, healthy boy in spite of the mud stains on his cheeks and nose.

"What have you been about all this time?" asked Mary.

"I've been ever so busy," he answered. "Just see what I've done," and he pointed to a curious dark object at one side of the summer-house, with an air of satisfaction. A heap of mould, soft, loamy soil, called in some parts of the country "buttery loam," was lying near him; a basin of water stood on a seat, and out of these materials Clare had been erecting a statue. Mary grinned.

"And what ever is it meant for?" she asked.

"It's meant for Apollo," answered he, "but it is not very like," he added, with the modesty of a true artist.

It certainly was not ; but at the same time there was a surprising amount of cleverness in the rude representation of a human figure, considering the age of the modeller and the character of the medium with which he worked.

“ Praises, Master Clare ! what put such an idea into your head ? Apollyon indeed ! ” cried Mary, who was more conversant with “ Pilgrim’s Progress ” than with Greek mythology, staring at the figure with a mystified air.

Clare laughed merrily.

“ Not Apollyon, Apollo ; he was a god, you know.”

“ Oh, fie,” said Mary, reprovingly ; “ ‘ thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image,’ you know ; pull it down, pray do, an ugly thing. What your aunt would say I don’t know.”

“ You won’t tell her, will you, Mary ? Besides, it is not a graven image,” explained Clare to allay Mary’s theological scruples, “ a graven image is a thing done with a tool,

and I have not got any tools," he added, ruefully.

"Well, well," said Mary, who indulged Clare in everything, though she felt bound to reprove him for his soul's health. "Come along do, and let me brush you clean, for you ain't fit for your aunt to see, and she'll be downstairs in a minute."

Clare, seeing the force of this argument, hurriedly pulled down his sleeves, looked once more affectionately at Apollo, and issued forth with Mary, shutting and locking the door, and pocketing the key.

CHAPTER III.

MISS ALWYN.

THE next morning saw Mrs. Welsman once more at her benevolent labours, for it was "Club day," and though most of the other ladies of the Club Committee attended in couples in rotation, Mrs. Welsman was alone in her place regularly every fortnight. The duty of a Club Committee lady was to sit at a deal table and receive the pence of the members, duly entering the amounts in a ledger and on the member's card. The women who came consisted chiefly of outsiders, for there were scarcely any poor among Mr. Perfect's congregation—a fact which his hearers were wont to enlarge upon as a proof of the superior refinement of their Service as compared with those of the rank and file of Nonconformity in Stokeland. The women came in through a side door, and

were divided from the presiding ladies by the long table ; but the unclean odour of poverty hung about their clothes ; their pence were often hot and damp ; there was always a draught where the ladies were stationed, and altogether there was no duty which Mrs. Welsman disliked so much as this which she was now performing. But she went through with it unflinchingly, and clung to it all the more for its being so unpleasing to flesh and blood. What a thin, intense face it is that looks across the table at each woman, and yet all the while seems looking at something beyond her, and listening for some inaudible sound ; the deep lines in her forehead, and the strange, eager eyes make her a remarkable woman at all times, and there is an inexpressible incongruity between her and her present employment. But Mr. Perfect, who comes in while she is at work, does not think so. He merely congratulates himself on possessing so useful a clerical deputy as Mrs. Welsman, and warmly admires her working

powers. Indeed Mrs. Perfect sometimes grows a little weary of his praises of "dear Mrs. Welsman," and remarks that no doubt the widow is glad of something to do.

It is one o'clock before Mrs. Welsman gets home, and during her absence she has had a caller in the shape of her neighbour in Anchor Street, Miss Alwyn, the authoress. Miss Alwyn, being unacquainted with the routine of Mrs. Welsman's duties, had come about twelve o'clock to ask her to spend the afternoon with her, and finding her out, had sat down to wait in the sitting-room which looked out into the garden. It was a fine morning, and she was growing tired of waiting, and feeling some inclination to go out into the fresh air, when she saw Clare, who had just come in from school, pass quickly down the garden and enter the summer-house. This decided her, and she at once followed him. He was standing before "Apollo," with a rueful air, for the arm of the divinity had proved very unmanageable

before breakfast, and he was on the point of giving up in despair.

"Good-morning, Clare," said Miss Alwyn, from the gravel walk, "when do you think your aunt will come back? I want her to come and spend the afternoon with me, so I do not like to go away without seeing her."

"She is sure to be at home at one," answered the boy, "for we have dinner then."

He was rather afraid of Miss Alwyn, and devoutly hoped that she would not see Apollo, feeling convinced that she would deride him, and not being at all sure that she might not "put him in a book," a fear which always haunted Clare in those days when in the authoress's presence.

Miss Alwyn had very sharp eyes, and she at once saw something unusual in the summer-house, and stepped in to inspect it more closely. Clare's heart was beating, and he felt exceedingly uncomfortable and hot; but as he could not order Miss Alwyn off his

premises, he had to bear it. She stared at the uncouth image with wonder, and inquired what it was.

"I was trying to make an image," said the boy shyly.

Miss Alwyn, to his great relief, was perfectly serious, and looked with critical interest at his handiwork.

"And what is it meant for?" she asked kindly.

"I meant to make Apollo," he answered, encouraged by finding that she was taking him seriously, "but I cannot make his arm stick up."

"And where did you see an Apollo?"

"There is one on the bookcase at school, and I sit where I can always see it."

"You are fond of modelling then?"

"I should be fonder of it than anything if I knew how to do it."

For a few moments Miss Alwyn said nothing, for the quick tears had sprung to her eyes and there was a choking in her throat.

The little scene touched her strangely—and plunged her back into the far-off time of her own youth. Here was another new young soul with eager artist-longings, groping in the dark, feebly and sadly as she had done for many a year. She looked down into the boy's face and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

“Would you like to learn?” she asked.
“Come with your aunt this afternoon and I will set you to work ; I do a little modelling myself and have got tools and plenty of clay ; it relieves my head when I have been writing hard, and I am fond of it, too.”

They went up the garden path together like old friends, though before to-day Miss Alwyn had taken little notice of Clare, having looked upon him as an ordinary schoolboy of probably disturbing and mischievous proclivities, and not a desirable visitor in her orderly and studious home.

Mrs. Welsman came home soon after and readily accepted the invitation for herself and

Clare, to the extreme pleasure of the latter, and so it happened that his first teacher in modelling was Miss Alwyn.

The next visit the authoress paid was to Mrs. Howe's, at the other end of the town. The house of the Quaker family stood in the main street, and was painted, and pointed, and varnished into a state of such neat propriety that it was at once obvious that it could belong to no other denomination. Three white steps led up to the door which was wide and handsome, and once within, you found yourself in the very heart of repose and exquisite cleanliness.

There is such a thing as to be negatively clean, and it is to be hoped that most families in the position of the Howes can boast of that virtue which consists in an absence of dust, cobwebs, and dirt generally ; but there is also such a thing as positive cleanliness, and this was a characteristic of the Howes' house.

Its purity was spotless—its carpets looked

always new—its furniture always shining. There was never a spot on the snowy linen above or below stairs, and the débris usually accompanying the daily life of a household was mysteriously absent.

Miss Alwyn wondered as she passed into the dainty drawing-room, with its odour of freshness and newly arranged flowers on every hand, what the secret could be that made the difference between her well-tended drawing-room and this, but could arrive at no satisfactory conclusion.

She was received by Alicia Howe only, Mrs. Howe and Gulielma having gone for a drive, and she was not sorry, Alicia being her favourite, and the most talkative of the family.

“Are you writing another book?” asked she, after some desultory talk.

“Yes, my dear,” said Miss Alwyn. “I am always scribbling something or other.”

“How I envy you,” cried Alicia, her dark eyes kindling. “It must be so delightful to

be an authoress, and I cannot write a line, and never shall! I never can imagine how you begin a story, and so many people write that I should always feel discouraged to think they were doing it better."

"No, my dear, you would not, if you had a vocation to write; you would not care at all what other people were doing, but just go straight on and tell your own tale in your own way. If you felt that you did not know how to begin, you had better not begin; you could not have much to say. As to others writing better, we must all be content to bear that, and nothing in the world could be done of any sort if we all waited till we could do it best. Do you think it discourages me to read Georges Sand and George Eliot? Not a bit of it; it rejoices and inspires me, and yet I shall never write like them."

"I never read their books, mother does not let us read many novels," said Alicia, blushing, and fearful that she had made a rude speech in excluding Miss Alwyn from the first rank of

novelists. "I like your books very, very much, and I do not expect they write any better than you do. I did not mean to say that any one did, I was only thinking how I should feel."

Miss Alwyn smiled at the innocent flattery of Alicia's speech, the heartfelt praise of a child was sweet to her, and she would scarcely have been an artist had it been otherwise. It was a cup of cool water offered by the wayside in the difficult journey of her chequered life.

Gentle steps and voices were heard in the passage, and Mrs. Howe and Gulielma entered the room.

"I wondered who it was with Alicia," said the mother, "I am very pleased to see thee," and she smiled a sweet sincere smile of welcome.

"I am a very early caller, Mrs. Howe," said her visitor, "but I came in to see if you and your daughters would take a cup of tea with me this afternoon, to meet Mrs. Welsman."

"We shall enjoy coming," answered Mrs. Howe; "I think, though, that thou hast promised to read to Mary James, and take tea with her—hast thou not?" she asked Alicia.

"Yes, mother dear, I did; but it will do as well to-morrow," said Alicia, eagerly.

"Thou wouldst not disappoint her, dear?" said the mother, gently; and, turning to Miss Alwyn, she explained, that Mary James was a blind old woman who counted on Alicia's visits as her greatest pleasures.

Alicia pouted, for a visit to Miss Alwyn's was one of the events of her quiet life.

"I will go to Mary James," said Gulielma, "if she will put up with me instead of Alicia; it is a pity she should be disappointed."

And so it was settled, and at five o'clock Mrs. Howe and Alicia set out for Miss Alwyn's, Gulielma walking with them as far as the old woman's little house.

"Oh, Gulie," whispered Alicia, penitently, looking up into her sister's face as she stood on the step that led into the cottage gardens, "how good it is of you! I wish I was not so selfish!"

"I am glad to do it, dear; it is no sacrifice to speak of, because I daresay I shall go there some other day; I hope thee will have the pleasantest time possible."

And she ran up the steps and disappeared.

"How I wish I was more like her," thought Alicia; "I always feel as if I must have things; it is so dreadfully hard to deny one's self."

CHAPTER IV.

AN ESCAPE.

MISS ALWYN lived in lodgings in a pretty house on the opposite side of the road to Mrs. Welsman's. It was a small house, and Miss Alywn's one sitting-room was the best apartment it contained, and ran through from the front to the back, with a window at each end. She had furnished it herself, after her own taste, and though it was plain as to its furniture, and could not boast a single expensive knick-knack, Alicia Howe always looked upon it as the most interesting room in Stokeland. It had just that savour of the wide world that was lacking in her own home, and on every side were evidences of a varied life. There was an easel in one corner, with a good engraving of some new picture, or a photograph from Rome, or a sketch of an Eastern ruin, with fallen

columns and stagnant pools and ibises. The walls, too, were hung with pictures, some of them by the hands of artists now becoming famous, and one little landscape was the gift of a great master to the authoress. The only piece of sculpture in the room was an exquisite bust of a girl on a pedestal in one corner, and Alicia was never tired of looking at it, and wondering at the delicate touches that had made the marble into a poem; the clear rounding of the features, the folds of the robe, the fretwork of fine lace round the neck and bosom, and the dainty moulding of the rose in the girl's hair.

The floor of the room was polished, with a square of carpet in the middle, and the curtains that hung on each side of the two windows were brown and gold.

"In our climate there should always be a touch of sunlight in the furnishing of rooms," Miss Alwyn had said, when she chose her colours; "nothing can be in worse taste or feeling than heavy, cold, half-tints, slaty

blues, and dirty greens, and I'll have none of them." Accordingly she had fixed on her brown and gold, with a deep touch of crimson here and there, and the effect justified her choice, and gave a tone to her room that was harmonious and oriental.

The Welsmans arrived nearly at the same time as Mrs. Howe and Alicia, and Clare was somewhat dismayed to find that there were other visitors, for he feared that Miss Alwyn, absorbed by them and his aunt, would have no time to attend to him. He did not know the authoress.

No sooner was tea ended, and the tray removed, than Miss Alwyn, with a smile at Clare, produced a cloth which she spread on the floor at the farther end of the room, a wooden stool, some tools, and some clay, and at once set him at work to model a large lily which she had herself copied some time before.

"I have not ventured on an Apollo yet," she said to him, "so I must set you upon something humbler to begin with."

And giving him a few rapid instructions, she went back to the others, who were looking at her photographs.

"Did you hear of the escape from the Footbridge Asylum this morning?" asked she of Mrs. Howe.

"I heard something of it while Gulie and I were in the town, but I thought it was a false alarm," she answered.

"Who escaped?" asked Mrs. Welsman, with a nervous gesture of her hands.

"A man who was considered quite harmless," answered Miss Alwyn; "he has been in the asylum for years, my landlady says; she knows all about it, because her brother is a keeper at Footbridge, and called in this morning. Several of them were out searching, but nothing was heard of the unfortunate man, and they were afraid he had got into some mischief. It seems he had gradually recovered so far that he was allowed to walk alone in the grounds, and this morning he managed to slip out."

Mrs. Welsman let the book she held fall heavily to the ground, and stooped to pick it up. When she rose her face was ghastly white, and her hands trembled so that she could scarcely lift the large volume to the table. But the other three happened to be looking at Clare just then, and took no notice of her.

“I hope they will catch him,” said Alicia; “I do so dread lunatics. Why he may be anywhere—he may come into our garden! I shall certainly set John to search before we go to bed!”

“Perhaps John is afraid of lunatics too,” said Mrs. Howe, smiling, “it is hardly fair to send him out alone; thou shouldst go and help him.”

“I shall bolt my window and lock my door, and lie trembling under the clothes,” said Alicia.

“What a terrible curse it is—madness,” Mrs. Howe went on, “I always feel it a great cause for thankfulness that we have never

been permitted to suffer from it, either on my husband's side or mine."

"Don't be too sure, Mrs. Howe," said Miss Alwyn, "I believe we are all a little mad; *I* am, I know, only I am sharp enough to keep it to myself. Can you conscientiously say that you are always quite reasonable?"

"Mother's mania is for new floor cloth," said Alicia; "I believe she would waste all the substance of the family in it, if she had not two prudent daughters— What is that?" cried she, starting up, for there was a sound without of tramping feet. They all moved over to the front window where Clare was sitting, but they could see nothing, only hear the tread of those footsteps moving onward towards them.

It was such a quiet street, and the evening was so still, that it sounded as if a crowd was coming. For a few moments they came in sight, and it was only about a dozen people. Walking between two men, without a hat, and waving his arms, was a man of about

fifty years of age—perhaps less, for he looked like one prematurely aged by illness or misfortune. He was a handsome man, with a military bearing, but there was a wild expression in his eyes, and he was strangely dressed, the different articles of clothing which he wore belonging evidently to several suits.

Alicia Howe drew back with a slight scream as he paused opposite Miss Alwyn's window. He heard it, and, looking up, saw the group of faces watching him. For a moment his eyes roved from one to another, then he suddenly grasped the railings and cried with a piercing voice—

“Millicent! Millicent! save me!”

There was a heavy fall within the room; Mrs. Welsman had fainted. They turned from the window and lifted her upon the sofa, and with some difficulty forced some brandy between her lips. Meanwhile the two keepers were trying to draw the madman away from the railings, and the little

crowd was momentarily increasing in numbers. Clare Welsman gazed at the man as if some spell had fallen upon him. Not even his aunt's fainting could keep him from the window, but the wild figure outside took no notice of him, and went on watching the window. Presently, however, seeing that no one but Clare was visible, he yielded to the keepers' persuasions, and allowed them to lead him away, muttering as he went—

“A vision! a vision! she died and has come to life again!”

It was some time before Mrs. Welsman was well enough to return home. She shuddered and turned pale at every sound.

“You overtire yourself with all those poor people,” said Miss Alwyn; “you ought to go out and have a thorough change and do nothing.”

“I am sorry to have alarmed and troubled you all so much,” said Mrs. Welsman, “I think I must be nervous, and the sight of”—

"Yes," broke in Alicia, "it was enough to frighten any one; I felt quite faint myself."

"Poor man!" sighed Mrs. Howe, "I wonder what his history is."

"What a good thing that he is taken before he has done himself any harm," said Alicia.

"Are mad people always mad?" asked Clare.

"No, my boy," answered Miss Alwyn, "they are not always mad any more than sane people are always sane; sometimes people are only mad once in their lives, but the world rarely forgives them for it."

"Doesn't it?" asked Clare with large wondering eyes, looking solemnly into Miss Alwyn's face.

"You must not listen to my nonsense, Clare," she said, seeing that he was taking what she said *au pied de la lettre*, "we are all sane enough here, not to trouble our heads about the matter."

"I think now we had better go home,"

said Mrs. Welsman in a strange suppressed voice, "I am quite well again."

She did not look by any means well, and the Howes took their leave at the same time and saw her to her own door.

"Shall I come in and sit with you a little while?" asked Mrs. Howe.

"No, thank you; you are very kind, but I think I will go to bed," and she smiled faintly.

"There is something very odd about Mrs. Welsman, mother," said Alicia Howe as they went down the street. "She always looks so anxious when she is not speaking; she must have been very handsome."

"She is a widow, dear, and no doubt has had a great deal of sorrow," said Mrs. Howe gently.

"I should like to know more about her," said Alicia.

"What will you have for supper, auntie?" asked Clare when they had passed into the

dining-room, and his aunt had thrown off her bonnet and cloak, and sat on the sofa, leaning her head on the cushions.

She did not answer his question, but seized his hands and drew him towards her.

“Look at me, Clare,” she cried, and the boy looked her straight in the eyes with his frank thoughtful gaze. She was flushed, and there was a stray lock of black hair on her shoulder, and her fine features were lit up with a strange glow of pained excitement. “Promise me that you will be a good man,” she went on; “that whatever comes you will be good, God helping you.”

“Yes, I will try; I do try to please you, aunt, but I know sometimes I am bad-tempered.”

“Ah, it is not that I mean,” said she, letting go his hands and clasping hers together in a kind of despair. “I know you try to please me, my darling, my darling.” She clasped him suddenly to her breast and

kissed him on his face and hair. "Go to Mary, and have your supper and then go up to bed. I am going at once."

He went down into the kitchen feeling dazed and uncomfortable. He could not understand his aunt, and was half frightened at her sudden burst of passionate affection. She had never been like this since he could recollect her, and that was ever since he was five years old. He was glad to escape to the humble but cheerful society of Mary, and her great grey cat, and to bask in the glow of the kitchen fire after all the day's excitement.

"How skeered your aunt looks, Master Clare," said Mary, when she had seated him at the table and given him some rice pudding and a cake which she had baked specially for his benefit.

"Oh! she is not well," he answered, "she fainted away at Miss Alwyn's and we were all frightened, for there was a madman came; he had run away from the Asylum and they were taking him back again."

“ Poor thing ! ” said Mary, “ and who was there besides your aunt and you ? ”

“ Mrs. Howe and Miss Alicia, the Quakers, you know ; I like them very much,” said Clare, “ and I think I will be a Quaker when I grow up.”

“ Lor, you must not think of such a thing,” replied Mary, “ what ever would your aunt say, why they don’t believe in the Bible, I’ve heard.”

“ That they do,” said Clare, “ why Miss Gulielma is always reading it to the old people.”

“ Lord bless her, so she is,” said Mary repentantly ; “ I’d forgot as she was one of ’em ; she *has* been good to my mother, and I believe she’d a died last winter but for her and her coverlets and warm soups. She’ll have a good place in Heaven, Bible or nor Bible,” said Mary.

“ And Miss Alwyn is going to teach me to model,” cried Clare triumphantly.

“ Teach you to muddle ! ” said Mary, “ bless

the boy, I am sure you don't need that ; a queer old maid she is to be sure. Why you are always playing Meg's diversions with something a'ready and don't want her to teach you."

Clare laughed till he choked, and then laughed again with such irresistible merriment that Mary joined in and they laughed together. Mrs. Welsman upstairs heard the sound, for the kitchen door was open and her bedroom was immediately overhead. She was on her knees by the bedside, in an agony of prayer. "Oh! Lord, save him!" she was crying, "let Thy anger fall on me—the sin is mine—let me bear it all and spare my darling—keep him from the curse and take me as a sacrifice"—she broke off into wild sobs that shook her slight frame, and for half the night through she prayed and wept.

CHAPTER V.

THE QUARTERLY MEETING.

THERE was a great stir among the Stokeland Friends every September, for during that month came round the periodical celebration entitled the Quarterly Meeting. It was held at different towns in the district in rotation, and was looked forward to with both pleasure and anxiety. The meetings were held for transacting the business of the Society, and began on Wednesday evening, extending over Thursday. What cleaning of already clean houses was set on foot beforehand! what arrangements and correspondences took place! It was currently reported and truly, that the Bevingtons, a family consisting of two maiden ladies and a brother, regularly began their preparations six weeks beforehand. I do not mean to say that they began cake-making, and setting in order of guest-

chambers, and other serious duties that precede the arrival of strangers, till the actual week of the festival, but a series of skirmishing was actually carried on before the real warfare commenced. The paint was scrubbed in an especially comprehensive manner; the bedding and hangings were overhauled, and deficiencies supplemented; the glass and china were had under review; the kitchen chimney was swept; mysterious additions were made to the ladies' wardrobes; in short enough was done to fully justify the before mentioned report.

But the arrival of the Monday previous to the Quarterly Meeting was a time of work and bustle in every Quaker household in Stokeland, from that of Eli Thomas, the retired shoemaker, to the mansion of Geoffrey Thorpe the wealthy banker. Hams and tongues, pickled at home and hung till the right flavour had been attained, were boiled that week; custards were made, and pies were baked; there were jellies and tarts unnum-

bered ; joints came home ready for roasting and boiling at the right moment ; and the larders of both rich and poor bore evidence of a generous hospitality.

On Wednesday afternoon, the first guests arrived, with divers bags and small cases ; these were the contingent that had accepted beds at the houses of their friends, and most of them belonged to the stricter division of the Society. Many of them were the cousins of their entertainers, for cousinship is cherished in Quaker circles to the third and fourth generation ; some would-be nearer relatives ; and there were plenty of cheery family parties to be found on that evening in Stoke-land.

On the Wednesday of the year of which I am writing the Howes had no lodgers in their house, which was an unusual case. Several circumstances had conspired to bring this about, the chief reason being that a family from the neighbouring town of Harrington, who generally took up their quarters with

Mrs. Howe, were just now absent from home on account of illness.

"I wish Hetty would leave poor Robert alone," said Gulielma, coming into the drawing-room where her mother was sitting; "she has just been giving him a violent scolding for making a footmark on the front door steps."

"What was he doing there?" asked Mrs. Howe.

Hetty was their cook of twelve years' standing, and Robert the page.

"Oh, the boy brought the cream for the whips to the front door by mistake, and Robert stepped down to take the jug from him," answered Gulielma, looking hot and worried by the domestic broil.

"I thought I heard her voice," said Mrs. Howe; "we really cannot keep him, if she quarrels with him so much."

"And yet it seems a pity to send him away," answered Gulielma; "he is the best boy we ever had."

"There is another dreadful upstir in the kitchen," cried Alicia, entering the room at this moment.

"Dear me, I hoped it had blown over," said Gulielma, wearily.

"Oh, this is a fresh one," said Alicia, laughing, "the footmark is effaced by a far direr offence—he has nearly broken Hetty's favourite jug."

"What does it matter, if he did not quite break it?" asked the elder sister.

"Just what I said to Hetty," replied Alicia; "but my arguments were received with such heat that I took refuge in flight, and left them to have it out."

"I wish the whole thing was well over," said Gulie, not that she was by any means inhospitable, but that the flesh was weary and her soul vexed within her.

The next morning dawned clear and beautiful, and then the Quarterly Meeting began in earnest. Carriages arrived, bringing those who lived within driving distance,

and others flocked in from the early trains. Ten o'clock was the hour of assembling, but before that time groups might have been seen in the outer rooms of the Meeting house, drinking tea and coffee, and indulging in lively gossip. Alice Sampson, the wife of George Sampson, the baker, always presided over this seasonable refreshment. She was a meek little woman dressed in sad colours, with a long, black, cloth cloak as outer garment, and a bonnet of the kind in vogue when Quakerism was in its infancy. Beyond inquiring softly—

“Will thee take some sugar?” “Is thy tea agreeable?” “Shall I get thee some cake?” she says but little, unless spoken to.

The vestibule of the Meeting house soon gets crowded, for to the little knot of tea and coffee drinkers are added rapidly the friends of Stokeland Meeting and their guests, and there is a cheerful buzz of voices and rustle of silks. The clerk of the Meeting comes bustling in with a green bag con-

taining his minute book and various documents, and the large room begins to fill with worshippers. There are not many seats to spare by the time that all have entered, and the scene is very different to that presented by the old Meeting house on ordinary days. In the first place there is a goodly row of ministers and elders occupying the upper seats, and conspicuous in the centre is a noted American minister, a strange-looking, burly man, with a capacious yellowish white hat on the seat beside him. He has been a backwoodsman, and indeed still is, but has come to England on a spiritual mission, and is travelling throughout the country from meeting to meeting. There are various types to be seen, from the Thomas Lambs, filled with the persuasion that they belong to "a peculiar people," and must abate no jot of their peculiarities, to the courtly M.P. and Sheriff of the County, who has driven his sleek horses over from Brenchley; but in nearly all the men and women present there

is a subtle flavour of Quakerism, discernible through all outward disguises.

There is a quaintness and formality about these Quaker gatherings that, to an outsider, has its ludicrous side. The very silence in the meetings for worship is intolerable and ridiculous to some people, and the Quaker theology, which pushes aside outward forms, recognising only the threefold God and conscience, seems to them of a laughable simplicity. But then so much depends on your point of view, and there are also to be found those who do not consider it the height of wisdom to call a piece of bread a man's Saviour. Others again doubt whether the Maker of the stars is so vitally interested in the question of total immersion as some are prone to imagine.

There is little silence to-day. The American minister prays in an uncouth accent, but with intense fervour and conviction, and then a lady seated near him rises and delivers a sermon of some length in a

gentle, thrilling voice. Other prayers and sermons follow, and one very young girl rises trembling, and repeats a hymn. The meeting then ends, and after a short interval the two sexes separate to transact business, the women trooping up some narrow, wooden stairs into the gallery of the building, which is separated from the principal room by wooden shutters, drawn back at will, in case of public meetings or other large gatherings. Mrs. Howe is the clerk of the women's meeting, and is soon seated at work at her table, calling over the names of Representatives, making minutes with a practised rapidity and correctness, and receiving written messages from the House of Lords on the lower story. Gulielma stays with her; but Alicia, who has perhaps as little of the Quaker element in her as anyone in the assembly, always eschews meetings of business, if possible, and on this occasion has hurried homewards where her presence is really required to superintend operations.

She was considerably relieved when, on arriving at the house, she found both kitchen and parlour at peace. Robert was busy laying the dining-table assisted by the housemaid, and Hetty, in face of a really great occasion, and need for action, was calm and sunny beyond her usual wont.

Alicia hurried out into the garden with a wide-mouthed basket, and soon returned with a many-coloured heap of flowers, which she proceeded to bestow about the dining-table, arranging a tiny bouquet for each guest, after a fancy of her own, and filling epergne and flower-glasses with roses and mignonette, and asters and fuchsias. She had already adorned the drawing-room before starting in the morning, and there was a great bouquet on the hall table. How pure, and dainty, and fragrant the whole house was! How pleasant the garden looked through the open door at the end of the cool, shady hall! and how charming Alicia was with her great,

soft, dark eyes, and heightened colour ! The guests soon began to arrive, for there was not much business, and then there was a great unpacking of bags and baskets containing net caps, and collars, and frills, and slippers, and Alicia always would have it that the more Quakerly the garb, the longer it invariably took to put on.

“I never intend to dress plainly,” she had remarked to her mother, “it takes too much time and thought. Why when I go out for the evening, I take off my hat and wraps, smooth my hair, put on my lace, and there I am ready to go down ; but Sophy Bevington is only beginning to take off her boots. I believe those net caps are a special snare of the Evil One. Only think, too, how long they must take to make ! Why, mother dear, thy caps are not half the trouble, and then how much prettier they are !”

“I think they suit Sophy Bevington, though,” answered her mother. “I used to

wear them when I was a girl, and they were thought a dangerous innovation when they first came in."

"Why what did the others wear?"

"Muslin caps, and the net ones were confined to the advanced spirits among the younger generation."

Gradually the ladies assembled in the drawing-room, and before the last loiterer had made herself ready, their husbands and sons joined them. The quaintest figures in the room were the Brenchley nurseryman and his wife, who looked like woodcuts from some ancient black letter volume, and scrupulously used the "plain language." They were received in exactly the same way as the guests of higher station, for among the Society of Friends is to be found a social equality of the soundest type; an equality where each class enjoys the right of courtesy and consideration, but where no attempt is made at levelling what can never be made level.

Dinner was served, and the assembled

company took their seats, and there was a few moments' reverent silence in place of an audible "grace," after which a general conversation commenced, both voices and sentiments being in a somewhat subdued key. The dinner was unpretentious, but every item perfect in kind, and water was the chief beverage, only one or two glasses of wine being taken, and these somewhat apologetically.

All the guests at the Howes' table were well known to them except one, and that was Norman Smith, a cousin of the Stoke-land Allens, who was living at Harrington, and was a clerk in the bank there. He was a young man of strong Quaker proclivities, but without any outward peculiarity, and was gifted with an ease of manner rare among his compeers. Gulielma, who sat by him at dinner, could not help contrasting him with Fred, his Stokeland cousin, who blushed when she spoke to him, and was too bashful to hand her a cup of tea unasked, when she spent the evening at his father's house.

Most of the company left early; some went to attend a special meeting held in the afternoon, and others made for the station or the hotel where their horses were standing. A few, however, lingered, and Mrs. Howe proposed a walk round the garden, which was large, and in full autumnal beauty. Somehow, Gulielma found herself again with Norman Smith, whom she was beginning to regard as quite an old friend, so fully had they compared notes on books, travel, preachers, and croquet, during dinner.

Alicia ran hither and thither gathering flowers for old Mr. Dickens, for his sick wife, who had no garden, and when she came up with her hands full, Gulielma's companion said to her in a low voice—

“That is hardly fair; why is the old gentleman to have all the favours? Won't you give me one flower?”

And Gulie, blushing all over her fair creamy white forehead, plucked a damask rose, and gave to him.

CHAPTER VI.

A WREATH OF AZALEAS.

MISS ALWYN had lived all her life in Stoke-land, and had long been thrown upon her own resources. Not that she had been obliged to earn her maintenance—that was ensured by a moderate income left to her by her father—but she had been obliged to shape her own course. Her parents had died while she was still young, and the brother whose house she kept for some years afterwards, married and went abroad, leaving Miss Alwyn high and dry in Stokeland. When this happened she was about thirty, and her outlook was not a cheering one. She was a quiet-looking, plain little woman, but under her unpretending exterior there lay a force of character and originality for which few of her acquaintances in Stokeland gave her credit. Year by year the romance of her

own life evaporated, and much romance had never fallen to her lot, though she had within a mine of tenderness and unclaimed devotion sufficient to have furnished half the pink and white beauties of her acquaintance. Naturally enough, the country town youth passed her over, and one after another took to themselves the pretty faces, and Miss Alwyn was left drifting towards spinsterdom with a certain ache at heart, and a longing for at least a pittance from all that the wide hopes of youth had promised. But with years and patience comes acquiescence. With a touch of scorn for a world that had failed to know her value, she turned to art, and instead of living to love like the ordinary woman, she began to live to write. She had always been mistress of a facile pen, and a dramatic gift, and her powers of insight and observation had slowly and surely been ripening as the years went on. She tried short stories first, but they did not meet with marked success. Some, indeed the most,

which she sent to magazines, were "declined with thanks," till she learned to listen with heart sickness for the postman's knock. She beat against the bars which threatened to hem in her flight towards the ideal on this side also.

Without influence and without literary connections, the struggle seemed unending. Still she wrote on, sadly, but undismayed, and her gift grew and prospered, and the exercise of it was every day easier and more pleasurable. She tried a complete and rounded tale, and resolved to try her fate upon its merits.

The world, instead of a vexatious and unresponsive mass, became her stage, her picture gallery, and her insignificant individuality expanded, and brought her all she longed for. Was she plain, unloved, misunderstood? Had she missed the bright gifts that youth and beauty claim? Here they were at her bidding. She made lovers to her mind, and created loveliness. She opened out her heart

into her work, and lived in it the life elsewhere denied her.

And the book was a success. It was well reviewed, and hit the public fancy, and the authoress became a name. Other books followed, and she found herself possessed of solid fame on both sides the Atlantic, and also of that pleasant wealth which is self-earned. Visitors sought her out, and some of them were much surprised to see her, having fancied her a sort of compendium of her own heroines. When they found a plainly dressed, rather old-fashioned-looking woman instead of a fascinating Hourì, they were disappointed. One absent literary gentleman was carried away so far by the shock of the discovery, that on being introduced, he gasped out, "And this is Miss Alwyn!" with a look and manner so much the reverse of complimentary, that his introducer was alarmed for the result. But the authoress was only amused, and often afterwards told the story as a joke against herself.

The literary gentleman and the rest forgot the fact that had Miss Alwyn possessed the poetic aspect and nymph-like form with which they had credited her, and which abounded in her tales, she probably would not have cared to write about them.

Clare continued to take lessons in modelling of her, and she was glad to have him come, for she felt a genuine interest in the lad. Besides, she was beginning to fear that the ideal world of her own imagining was looming too large, and shutting out the actual struggling personalities of everyday life. It made her feel a woman again as well as an artist, when she was thus showing kindness to a young creature dependent on her for help, and the boy grew more and more to love her and look up to her. The hours in her sitting-room, among her pictures and models, became the chief pleasure of his sombre life, and the friendship was a lasting good to Miss Alwyn and to Clare Welsman.

"Aunt," asked Clare suddenly one even-

ing, "what was my mother's Christian name?"

He had just come in from the garden, and had been sitting across a chair in silent meditation.

Mrs. Welsman was covering a heap of tracts with brown paper, and looked up sharply at him.

"Her name was Mary," she answered.

"And what was my father's name?"

"Theodore."

"It seems so odd that I was born in France. I suppose I must be a Frenchman," soliloquized the boy; "was I very young when they died?"

"No," said Mrs. Welsman uneasily; "Clare, I wish you would go round to Miss Alwyn's, and take this note for me; I was going to send Mary, but I think you had better take it at once."

Clare rose slowly and thoughtfully, and started on his errand, his mind unusually full of his genealogy. He had rarely thought

much about it before, but had accepted without much consideration the fact that his parents were both dead, and that his aunt had adopted him. He could remember no one but her, although this evening he had been groping backwards into his infancy to catch some chance memory of his mother. He could distinctly recollect being lifted over a puddle by his nurse, and feeling grievously offended at it; that was when he was three years old, and was his earliest remembrance. But there was no one but an old nurse at home to whom he could tell his grievance. He must have been very young when he lost his parents—then why did his aunt answer “No?”

He met Miss Alwyn in the street, and gave her the note, and walked back with her to her rooms to get a book which Mrs. Welsman had asked for.

Mrs. Scott, the landlady, opened the door for them, and as soon as they were in the passage, broke out excitedly,

"What do you think, miss? my brother is here, and he has just been telling me that the poor mad gentleman that frightened us all so in the summer is dead! isn't it dull? He was ill a week, and Tom was told off to be with him. He was quite tractable like, but kept on talking about Millicent—did you ever hear such a queer name?"

"Did any one come to see him?" asked Miss Alwyn.

"No, Tom says not. His brother put him in the Asylum, and he's dead, and there wasn't anybody else ever came to see him besides."

"Do you know what his name was?" asked Clare.

"Captain Mowbray, and he had been very well off and was quite the gentleman when he was in his right mind, but that wasn't often, poor thing; it's a mercy he's gone, I think."

By this time they were in Miss Alwyn's room, and she began to search for the book.

"Are they kind to people in lunatic asylums?" asked Clare.

"They used to treat them shamefully," answered Miss Alwyn, "but as a rule they are well treated now; it seems to me the worst thing must be when they have sane intervals and wake up to find themselves among madmen," she added, as much to herself as to the boy.

"I hope I shall never be mad," said he looking scared and strange.

"Never trouble your head about such nonsense," she cried cheerily, "you did that foot shockingly last night; suppose you come now and try at it again; the large toe is all out of joint."

"Thank you, Miss Alwyn, not to-night, because my aunt wants that book."

She gave the packet into his hands, and he went off down the street with it.

"That boy is getting morbid," said Miss Alwyn to herself; "he thinks too much and does not get enough knocking about; he

ought to have some good rough games to shake the fancies out of his head, and I shall tell his aunt so."

That night Clare Welsman awoke in an agony of terror. It was very dark, and the house was as still as death. His heart was beating violently and there was an unbearable weight upon his brain. He felt as if the whole world were sinking down upon him and crushing him. He tried hard to master himself and shrunk from waking his aunt, but it was all no use, and he crept out of bed and felt his way to her door and knocked. It was not the first time he had suffered thus, and he had always found her ready to answer him and soothe him, but to-night she made no answer, and there was a hollow empty sound when he rapped again. He turned the handle and called her, but no answer came, and he felt certain she could not be there, so he went downstairs, each separate stair creaking under his weight. There was still a light within the dining-room, and, when

he opened the door, his aunt sat by the table with a white wreath in her hand, and azaleas and white roses scattered round her. There were tears upon her cheeks, and she was ghastly pale.

"Clare!" she cried when she saw him, rising quickly, and going towards him, as if to hide her handiwork, "what is it?"

"Oh, auntie, it is the horrors again—I have not had them for so long. I could not stop alone. I could not find you upstairs; what are you doing so late?"

"Never mind," she said, pressing her hand to her heart, and bending to kiss him; "I have finished what I am doing, now; go up again, and I will come and sit with you till you go to sleep."

He obeyed her and leaving his door wide open lay down and waited.

Mrs. Welsman gathered together the scattered flowers, put the wreath and them into a box standing by her, and placing on the top a folded paper, shut, and tied, and

directed the package. On the folded paper was written in a feigned hand these words—

“Flowers for the grave of Captain Mowbray ; in your charity lay them there for an unhappy woman.”

And the box was directed to the wife of the Asylum doctor.

CHAPTER VII.

PROFESSOR NEWMAN'S LECTURE.

STOKELAND was covered with yellow placards announcing the fact that Professor Newman was coming to lecture on Comets, and that the chair would be taken by John Harvard, Esq.

"Who is John Harvard, Esq.?" asked Miss Alwyn of Mrs. Welsman, "it surely cannot be one of the cloth-making Harvards."

"Why not? I believe it is the junior partner who lives near London. He is in Stokeland very often, I hear, but I do not know him by sight, as he rarely comes into this part of the town; I suppose he only goes to the Mills and back. He always subscribes to our Benevolent Fund, and is a very good sort of man, I believe."

"I mean to go to the lecture," said Miss Alwyn, who had made up her mind to do so.

suddenly, she did not know why, "will you come too?"

"It is the evening of our Prayer-meeting, so I am afraid I cannot," answered Mrs. Welsman.

"Cannot you miss it for once? does it do you much good?" asked Miss Alwyn, who had been brought up an old-fashioned Churchwoman, and had never attended such a gathering.

"The spiritual must come first of all," said Mrs. Welsman hurriedly, "of course it does me good to go."

"And what do you all pray for?" asked Miss Alwyn.

"For help—for the forgiveness of sin," said Mrs. Welsman, her cheeks flushing, "for many other things."

"You cannot have many sins to confess, I'm sure," said the authoress cheerily, "your life is made up of good works."

"We all sin," said Mrs. Welsman, with her hands tightly clasped together, "I have

sinned, but my sins are forgiven—I have warrant for that. If only we could be delivered from their consequences! the curse is awful! will it ever be taken away?" she spoke more to herself than to her companion, and took leave of her as if she was scarcely conscious of her presence, but was looking at something far off.

Miss Alwyn occupied a front seat at the lecture that evening, and many people remarked her presence with surprise—it was such a rare event to see her at any Stokeland gathering. It had been very different some fifteen years ago; then she had attended every party and entertainment in the town, and was among the merriest of young pleasure seekers. She was thinking of it all to-night, and of the bitter pangs she had suffered in those days when she was expecting the enchanted prince. Several times she imagined that she had discovered him. Once it was in the person of Dick Matherson, the doctor's son, a good-looking youth who was

then walking the hospitals. But Dick, after a few dances and picnics, thought nothing of Bessie Alwyn, and before long married a cousin: he was at the lecture this evening and had become bald and stout and was anything but an interesting man. Then there was a charming Frenchman, a teacher of languages, whom Miss Alwyn's imaginative powers, not yet having found a fitting outlet, had invested with all the virtues. There was much excuse for her admiration of him, for he had a beautiful plaintive face, with black hair touched with bronze, and a warm, creamy complexion, and an exquisite manner, and one Stokeland girl broke her heart about him. Finally, one morning, M. Lenoir was missing, and so were various sums of money which he had borrowed, and no more was heard of him. What would have become of Miss Alwyn if she had won the love of either of these? Yet they had made her very miserable once upon a time.

Then there had come a day when she

ceased to believe altogether that the enchanted prince was coming, and the assemblies had grown dull, and it bored her to sit up half the night talking to people whom she cared nothing for, and till she had discovered the magic gift within her, the world had seemed stale, flat, and unprofitable.

After that discovery, she had, as I have said before, become so engrossed in the revelations that came to her, that her bitterness of spirit had passed away and her personal career had ceased to be of much moment to her. She revelled in her freedom from any hindering ties, and stood firm, self-centred.

To-night it was pleasant to her to be abroad. She had finished a good day's work, and was inclined to be amused, and if it fell out so, instructed, and when Professor Newman and his chairman appeared on the platform, she settled herself down to enjoy the evening.

The usual applause having subsided, the chairman rose to make his opening speech,

and Miss Alwyn's attention was centred upon him. She was given to closely observing the human beings with whom she came in contact, and Mr. Harvard was so unlike what she had expected, that she was more interested in him than in the learned lecturer. The idea which had floated through her mind in connection with Mr. Harvard, one of "those cloth-making people," as she had somewhat contemptuously described his firm, was that of a plain manufacturer, respectable, but uncultivated, and possibly of imperfect education. She saw before her a man a few years her junior, with a tall, slender figure, an entire absence of self-consciousness, an air of distinction, and a grave but pleasing face. It seemed impossible to associate him with the neighbouring cloth-mills and sturdy Mr. Miller, the resident partner, who sat not far from Miss Alwyn, with his red-faced wife in a brightly purple bonnet.

Even while she listened to the story of the

Comets and their celestial vagaries, her thoughts from time to time recurred to the chairman, and she caught herself observing and approving him.

When the lecture ended, there was a buzz of conversation in the hall, and several of Miss Alwyn's friends came up to her and kept her talking till a good part of the audience had dispersed. Before she had reached the door, she was arrested by the secretary of the Institute which had engaged the lecturer.

"I want to introduce you to the Professor, Miss Alwyn," he said, "we have not many lights to boast of in Stokeland, and we must not hide you under a bushel."

"Pray do not hide me anywhere," said she laughing, "but I do not expect the Professor wants to know me."

"The chairman does, at all events; he asked if you were here."

"I am afraid he will be very disappointed; people often are," she said sotto voce, for

by this time they had reached the other two whom the secretary introduced in due form.

"Thank you for your interesting lecture, I have enjoyed it very much and learnt a great deal," she said to the Professor.

"I am afraid I scarcely made myself so clear as I could have wished with regard to the orbit of last year's comet," he answered.

"You made me understand you, and I am remarkably stupid about astronomy," said the authoress.

"One cannot have all the talents," said he, politely.

"Are you writing us another book?" asked the secretary.

"Oh, of course I am always scribbling."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Harvard, speaking for the first time.

"Do you take the trouble to read my books, then?" she asked.

"I have read them all, and it is a great pleasure to meet their author."

"Are you often in Stokeland?" asked she, for the sake of saying something.

"Twice a week at the mills—but in the town proper not twice in two months."

"There is not much attraction to strangers in it," she said.

"I am too busy to think about that when I am down here," he answered, "there is so much to attend to in our business; so much, I mean, for the masters to see after."

Then he was really "one of the cloth-making people," and not a sleeping partner. It was on Miss Alwyn's tongue to ask him whether he liked it, but she bethought herself in time, and bade them all good-night.

"I should like to know more about that Mr. Harvard," she thought to herself, as she leisurely undressed. "He is the most gentlemanly man I ever saw in Stokeland, and he knows how to speak too."

CHAPTER VIII.

NORMAN SMITH.

A FEW weeks after the events described in a former chapter, one Sunday morning, Norman Smith appeared in company with his cousins at the Stokeland Meeting, and when it was over he walked home with the Howes—more especially with Gulielma.

For some reason or other she was not at all surprised to see him that morning; indeed if the truth must be told, she had felt a thrill of secret disappointment as Sunday after Sunday had passed by and he had not come. It was very delightful to her to see him again; he suited her taste, and of all men that she had met during her eighteen years, she could most easily love him should he ask it.

When her mother asked him to come in with them, Gulielma was full of tremulous

happiness. They went into the drawing-room and talked for half an hour, of she scarcely knew what, and then he looked at his watch and hurried away, for the Allen's dinner hour had arrived, and he had forgotten all about time.

Gulielma was become already his ideal woman, and he was always thinking of her soft voice and sweet serene face. His heart sank as he left her presence, for as yet he could not speak to her, and such an interview as that day's was a stolen pleasure. What right could he have to ask such a girl as this to tie herself to him? a girl lapped in comfort and surrounded with elegant and dainty things.

He had no means except his salary, and the highest style to which his wife could aspire for years to come, must be a furnished lodging. He tried to fancy Gulielma Howe making puddings and mending shirts, and the more he thought of it the more certain he was that it could not be.

There was poor Tom Weston, a fellow-clerk of his, and equally well born with himself, who had married two years ago, and was living in a tiny house with a girl of fifteen to keep it in order and help his wife with her two babies—those terrible twins—which had arrived to the mingled consternation and pride of the small ménage, one morning last spring.

Mrs. Weston, a pretty helpless child, had faded sadly under the stern schooling of poverty, and the thought of her face as he had seen it only on Saturday as she walked beside Tom, who was pushing the perambulator, made Norman's heart ache.

It was quite clear to him that in his present poverty, he must keep silence towards Gulielma. It was very hard, for other men must surely see how sweet she was—men with carriages, and servants, and luxurious houses, and all that smoothes the path for love, and he must see her stolen from him—but there was no help for it.

He thought of all this as he ran quickly up

the winding path that led to his uncle's grounds, and was a trifle nettled at the jokes of Bobby Allen, a sandy-haired youth of twelve, as to the cause of his being late for dinner.

Gulielma, meanwhile, in the fragrant seclusion of her own chamber, was sitting, as was her wont at that hour of Sunday, with her Bible open on her lap and was reading the story of the gracious Princess, Bethuel's daughter, how she left her father's house and travelled far with Eleazer till she met her betrothed, but unknown husband, wandering across the fields to meet her, and Gulielma wondered whether Isaac had pleasant dark eyes and a winning way with him like Norman Smith.

"Is that young Smith coming here after Gulie?" asked Alicia of her mother with a clouded brow, when they were alone.

"What put such a thing into thy head child?" said Mrs. Howe, with a tinge of the same loving jealousy at her own heart, though she would not acknowledge it. "Thee must not

fancy that every one who comes near thy sister is in love with her."

"But isn't it likely, mother dear? She is so pretty and nice, and he talked to her all the time at the Quarterly Meeting, and she looked so pleased. What should I do if she fell in love with him and went away!" cried Alicia.

"I do not know that Norman Smith thinks of her, dear, but such things will happen," said the mother, putting her arm round her youngest daughter; "thee would like Gulie to be happy, would thee not? We must look these things in the face now that she is a young woman, and if the time should come for us to give her up, we must try not to think of ourselves. But the time is not come yet; do not cry, love—remember that French proverb that says the worst evils we endure are those that never happen; perhaps I shall have you both old maids after all."

"Oh! I wish we could always go on just as we are!" cried Alicia, and Elizabeth Howe silently echoed her wish with an inward pang.

CHAPTER IX.

AT MRS. MILLER'S.

MISS ALWYN'S wish was accomplished with a celerity which that lady little dreamed of. Indeed she had almost forgotten Mr. Harvard's existence, so absorbed had she been in following the fortunes of a wayward heroine, when a few days after the date of the lecture on Comets, she received a large square card by the early morning post.

Whether some dainty Ariel interested in the authoress, had breathed vain thoughts into Mrs. Miller's soul, or whether it all fell out by chance, I do not know, but it is certain that she was seized about this time with an irrepressible desire to give a party. Not such a party as she had usually summoned, consisting of a few old friends and their sons and daughters, but a large and comprehensive gathering, including all that was visitable

among the inhabitants of Stokeland and the neighbourhood. It had required much preparation and thought to bring the scrambling bourgeois household of the Millers into due order for the great undertaking, but at last it was accomplished, and the cards sent out as a beginning of the end.

Miss Alwyn smiled as she read the gilded inscription on the card, and mentally resolved that not the most gorgeous entertainment given by Mrs. Miller should tempt her from her cosy solitude.

"Now that is the beauty of being unmarried," she soliloquized; "if I had a husband he would make a fuss about the expense if I wanted to go, or set his mind upon being there if I did not. I have only got myself to please and I can do just as I like."

Later in the day she took pen in hand and declined the invitation in the accepted form of polite mendacity, resolving to post the note early the following morning. It was decreed

however that it should never be despatched, for as she sat reading in the firelight that evening she received the following letter from Mrs. Welsman.

“MY DEAR MISS ALWYN,

“You have always been so kind to Clare that I take the liberty of asking you for another favour. If you are going to Mrs. Miller’s party, will you allow him to go with you? I never attend such gatherings, as you know, and he is too shy to go alone. It is his own proposition, and he is greatly taken with the idea of the party, as it is the first large one he has been invited to.

“With kind regards,

“Yours sincerely,

“MARY M. WELSMAN.

“Oct., 2nd, 18—”

How could Miss Alwyn refuse? it would have been enough to answer that she was not going to Mrs. Miller’s, but there was a soft place in her heart for the lonely boy

with his dull surroundings, and his pleading face rose before her imagination and vanquished her. She had not the heart to disappoint him, so she sacrificed her inclinations and sent a kindly merry little note round accepting him for her squire on the fourteenth, and began to debate what she should wear.

The next day Alicia Howe came in very full of talk about the party to which she and her sister had been invited.

"Gulie was not sure that we ought to go," she told Miss Alwyn, "but there is to be plenty of room for those who do not dance, like Gulie and me; the dancing is to be in a marquee, and of course we need have nothing to do with it. Mamma gave her consent to our going, so I am sure Gulie need not mind, and we are going to wear the dresses we had for Jenny Hutchinson's wedding—mauve silks; what shall you wear, dear Aunt Bessie?" Alicia had adopted Miss Alwyn as a relation some time ago.

"I thought of wearing black silk ; I generally do when I go out."

"I wish you would wear some colour," said Alicia ; "dark red would suit you capitally."

"No, I had better not make a Merry Andrew of myself ; I'll stick to my 'customary suit of inky black.' "

"Then I insist on doing your hair myself ; I shall come in that afternoon and set you to rights and bring you some flowers."

"You are a kind little lassie," said Miss Alwyn ; "you had better not waste your labours on a plain old woman."

The night of Mrs. Miller's party arrived and her guests began to assemble at eight o'clock. At about half-past eight the Howes appeared, under the wing of young Mrs. Rowlands, a friend of theirs who had lately married, and soon after Miss Alwyn and Clare came. Alicia's efforts had made a wonderful change for the better in the authoress, and she looked ten years younger than

when left to her own devices. Several people remarked that Miss Alwyn was growing quite good-looking, and in truth she was far more pleasing now than in her youth.

There was a depth of expression in her face and a dignity of carriage which had come with her growth in character, and her complexion was pure and even. Alicia had placed a yellow rose in her dark hair and some more in her bodice, and seen to it that she wore a soft fall of lace, and felt proud of the effect her skill had produced. Gulielma and Alicia were dressed exactly alike in the pale mauve silks ornamented with delicate ruffles at neck and wrists, and wore white stephanotis. Clare Welsman thought Alicia the prettiest creature he had ever seen, and could not refrain from watching her. He had grown tall in the last year, and looked older than his age, and had attained a very fair skill in modelling under Miss Alwyn's teaching.

They all passed into the drawing-room when they had taken coffee at the buffet in the small

breakfast-room, and watched the arrival of the other guests. With a pang of jealous apprehension, Alicia saw Norman Smith enter and at once make his way to their side of the room.

"May I have the pleasure of the first quadrille?" he asked Gulielma.

"Thank you," she answered blushing, "I am not going to dance."

"What a pity," said Norman, disappointed, "won't you try just one dance?"

"But I do not know how to dance," said Gulielma; "I would dance with you with pleasure if I did with any one."

"I wish you would let me teach you; it is very easy, and you would get into it directly."

"No thank you," said she, "I must be content to sit still."

For once in her life, Alicia felt grateful for their Quaker disabilities, seeing that they were the means of discomfiting Norman Smith whom she had learnt to regard as a bird of prey hovering round the family dove cot.

But Norman Smith showed no signs of a signal defeat. On the contrary he settled down at Gulielma's side with a reckless disregard of his duties as a young man who had been asked to dance. He could not yet tell Gulielma that he loved her, but there could be no objection to his sunning himself in her presence—at least so he decided, with the natural casuistry of youth and hope.

“Alicia, shall we go and look at the dancing? I hear they have begun,” said Miss Alwyn, good-naturedly playing into Norman's hand.

“If you like,” answered Alicia reluctantly; she hated to leave the bird of prey, with his glossy plumage and seductive ways, alone in charge of her sister, and hoped that Clare would stay behind. Nothing however was farther from Clare's intention; he came out to enjoy himself, and his idea of enjoyment was not to sit still in Mrs. Miller's drawing-room.

“Would you try this polka with me, Miss

Alicia?" asked he diffidently, when the quadrille was over.

"You will find me very clumsy," she answered; "you had better ask some one else."

"I do not dance very well," said Clare, "but I have no doubt we shall get on all right."

"I do not know whether mother would like me to dance," thought Alicia, "I will only stand up this once, there cannot be any harm in dancing with a boy like Clare." She was only a year older than he was, but she felt very much his senior and patronized him accordingly. Still she was very bright and pleasant, and the two got on so well that Clare wondered how it was that he had always felt so shy with the Howes.

The polka was a very long one, and at its close, Alicia noticed for the first time that Miss Alwyn was talking to a gentleman whom Alicia had not seen before.

"Who is that?" she asked Clare.

"That is Mr. Harvard, Mr. John, partner in the mills," said he.

"He is very nice-looking," said Alicia. "I think I will go and find my sister now."

Norman Smith and Gulielma were deep in a conversation of such absorbing interest that they did not notice Alicia till she was quite close to them.

"I thought you danced," she said severely to Norman.

"You were right, Miss Alicia, will you dance with me?"

"Thank you, I am not going to dance any more to-night."

"Have thee been dancing then?" asked Gulie, looking up anxiously.

"Yes; why not?" asked her sister mischievously, for she was annoyed with Gulie and angry with Norman. She did not say who her partner had been till after Norman was gone.

Mr. Harvard enjoyed that evening much more than he had expected. He was a

widower, with two little girls who weighed heavily on his mind, and he had been telling Miss Alwyn all about it. She, having the poetic gift of sympathy, had comprehended his difficulties, and led him on insensibly from one revelation to another, and he was feeling soothed and lightened of his cares. She, too, was pleased with her evening, and when she looked back upon it she was amused to remember how much time she had spent in Mr. Harvard's society, and how much she had learnt about him.

It was one o'clock when she and Clare left, and the Howes' carriage was waiting. The last glimpse of their party that Miss Alwyn had was as she drove off, and she noticed that Norman Smith was handing Gulielma down the steps of the porch, while Alicia's face looked out sternly from behind them into the darkness.

CHAPTER X.

MISS ALWYN'S VISITORS.

A FEW days after Mrs. Miller's party, a neat hamper was deposited at Miss Alwyn's door by the carrier, and brought in to her as she sat at her writing.

"It must be some mistake, Jane," she said to the handmaid who carried it. "I am not expecting anything by rail."

"It's in your name, Miss," answered Jane, and Miss Alwyn rose and read the label.

There could be no doubt about the matter ; whatever the hamper contained it was her property.

"Get me a knife, Jane," she said, and began fumbling at the string that tied down the lid. A delicious perfume exhaled from the basket as the untying and cutting went on, and when finally the lid was raised, Miss

Alwyn and Jane broke into a simultaneous cry of admiration. It was the loveliest basketful that ever visited a single lady's abode. There were white roses and red roses, and great regal-looking blossoms of purple clematis, and clusters of stephanotis, and sprays of fern, and on the top lay a card, on which were inscribed the words, "With John Harvard's compliments."

Miss Alwyn had not imagined that anything in her own history could have given her the pleasure which those flowers did. She took them out tenderly, one by one, and arranged them about her room with girlish delight, till it looked all ready for a fête; they were such lovely and fragrant things, and it was so pleasant to be thought of, and considered, and so few graceful attentions had fallen to her lot hitherto. She blushed like a girl as she took up the card and put it by, and she blushed again when, later in the day, the postman brought a letter in a strange hand, running thus—

“Fulham, Oct. 18th, 18—.

“DEAR MISS ALWYN,

“I recollect you admiring Mrs. Miller’s greenhouse, and telling me that you had no garden, so I hope you will accept a few flowers that I have taken the liberty of sending you this morning.

“Yours very truly,

“JOHN HARVARD.”

Of course the letter must be answered, and Mr. Harvard must be thanked, and it was a curious thing that Miss Alwyn, who was ordinarily so glib of pen, experienced the greatest difficulty in composing that short and simple letter. She wrote and altered it three times, and finally sent off about eight lines on a tinted sheet of paper.

“What can have come to me? I am a perfect fool to-day,” she said to herself angrily, when the letter was despatched. “It is a mercy that I live alone, or I do not know what any one might think”—

And she gave herself a mental shake, and set to work vigorously on the ruled sermon paper which she was in the habit of filling patiently day after day.

Her writing went on somewhat after this style—

“Eveline opened an ivory casket of exquisite workmanship, and hastily pushing aside a long string of pearls and some golden ornaments, she drew out”—

(“I wonder what made him send them—how kind and thoughtful—he looks just like it”)—

“She drew out a miniature set with brilliants. It was a likeness of Gerald at the age of twenty”—

(“I daresay I shall never see him again. What stuff I am thinking of! you stupid old self!”)

“And the face bore a striking resemblance to her own. The eyes were dark and lustrous, and the glossy hair was jet black”—

(“It is perfectly ridiculous for a plain

woman like [me to think of anything of the sort : nobody used to fall in love with me in my youth, and nobody ever will.”)

“He was dressed in a suit of black velvet, and wore a gold chain round his neck”—

Here Miss Alwyn’s imagination failed her, and she fell into a fit of musing with the pen in her hand. Then she rose and smelt her flowers, and rearranged some straggling blossoms, and at last paused in front of the looking-glass, and looked into its depths earnestly and fixedly.

“A sight of my plain face shall settle it once for all,” she said. “I am ageing very fast, and I have no complexion, and I know I have a good many wrinkles, and I never had any features to speak of.”

She was half startled at the image that the mirror reflected ; she realized for the first time that years had added attraction to her face—the contour was more regular, the expression more piquant than in youth—and she wore her hair in the style taught her by

Alicia Howe, with a long, glossy plait wreathed round her head like a coronet. She turned away impatiently, and sat down to her work once more.

"If such a thing were possible, it is too late," she said, "twenty years too late."

Miss Alwyn's flowers faded, as flowers will, and she was once more absorbed in her new book, when she was one day recalled to the consideration of Mr. Harvard by a call from that gentleman himself. He stayed for nearly an hour, had a cup of tea, and a great deal of pleasant chat on all kinds of subjects. Both he and Miss Alwyn found each other congenial, and neither of them was in the habit of meeting with many congenial people. To Mr. Harvard, intercourse with a witty, and intelligent, and sympathetic woman was so refreshing, that he hardly knew whether Miss Alwyn was handsome or no, and, if the truth must be told, his experience of handsome women had not been satisfactory. He had married his late wife for her fine figure

and fair complexion, and golden hair, and his marriage had not been a success, the owner of the above-named attractions having considered them the just grounds for making inordinate claims upon his purse and patience. He had been carried away by a boyish passion for her, but it was such a passion as does not stand the wear and tear of life with a heartless, greedy, small-souled woman, and though he had honestly striven to do his duty by her, he had been very unhappy in doing it.

They had been married for about ten years when she caught cold at a Race Meeting, by sitting in an east wind, clad in a gossamer dress, and died within a week, leaving her husband with two little girls. That was five years ago, and Mr. Harvard had as yet made no attempt to console himself, though Mrs. Miller was not slow to hint that it was his duty to do so, and even on one or two occasions had introduced him to eligible damsels. He always had repelled these advances with cold courtesy, and had been fairly happy in

the society of Tossy and Flo, whose idol he was.

Lately he certainly had thought a good deal of Miss Alwyn, and had been attracted strongly towards her by their slight intercourse. He knew her by her books long before he met her, and liked what he had found in them—a sincere and sympathetic spirit, a quick intelligence, and sense of humour. All these he found repeated in their author.

“Do you care for peaches?” he asked her as he was leaving. “We are rather proud of ours at Fulham, and I should like to send you some.”

“You are very kind,” said Miss Alwyn. “I must thank you once more for your lovely flowers. I do not know when I have enjoyed anything more.”

“I am very glad you liked them,” he answered, inwardly resolving to send some more, and looking very bright.

On the following Thursday Miss Alwyn was sitting by the window reading the news-

paper in a rather indolent mood, when she became aware of a gentle knock at the street door. She wondered whether any early caller had arrived for her, but did not feel specially interested in the matter, or rise from her chair to view the visitor. Consequently she was altogether unprepared for the apparition that after a short delay in the passage presented itself to her. First the door was thrown open—there was an unaccustomed patter of light footsteps on the floor-cloth—and then two little figures clad in dainty embroidered dresses of pale blue, with golden curls on their shoulders, came in and sedately stood before her.

“Please papa sent you some flowers and some peaches,” said the elder one with a clear precise intonation. “They are out of our garden.”

“Papa is afraid that the peaches are not all quite ripe,” said the least of the two in the prettiest falsetto voice.

“And who is your papa, my darlings?” asked Miss Alwyn.

"Mr. John Harvard, that lives at The Grove at Fulham," said the eldest, and both set the baskets they held on the table. They were both quite composed, though they blushed when they began speaking.

Miss Alwyn made them sit down, and gave them some cakes, which they ate in a neat, unchildish way, taking great care not to scatter any crumbs.

"And how old are you? Are you Tossy?" asked she of the elder one.

"Yes, I am Tossy; I am ten years old. This is Flo, and she is seven."

"Tossy was ten last Monday, and papa took us in a boat, and we had a picnic, and Jet fell in the water."

"Jet is my dog," said Tossy, explaining the story with grave good breeding. "But he was soon pulled out again, and he did not seem to care."

"Does papa often take you out?" asked Miss Alwyn.

"He takes us out when he is at home," said Tossy; "but he has to go away often."

"And what do you do with yourselves all day when you are alone?"

"We are in school all the morning, and then we go for a walk with Miss Carr, and in the afternoon we play in the garden, and then we learn our lessons."

She sat still for a few moments as if waiting to see whether Miss Alwyn had anything more to ask; then she put on her gloves and settled Flo's hat properly, and said—

"I think now we ought to go; papa told us to come back soon to the mill."

"Will you take back your baskets?" said Miss Alwyn. "Tell Mr. Harvard that I am very much obliged to him for the lovely flowers and fruit, and still more for sending you to bring them."

She began taking out the flowers, and Tossy lifted out the peaches as deftly as if she had been a housekeeper all her life, and laid them one by one on a plate, taking care that they were not bruised. It was very touching to Miss Alwyn to see the sedate

precocity of the motherless little one, and when they went away she kissed both the children with all her heart.

I am afraid that though Mr. Harvard was a good man there was a considerable amount of cunning in his character.

CHAPTER XI.

AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

A WEEK or two after the advent of Tossy and Flo, Mr. Harvard himself appeared one afternoon in Miss Alwyn's drawing-room. He had been thinking a great deal about the step he was about to take, and it seemed to him more advisable every time he thought of it. He was growing more attached to Miss Alwyn as the weeks went on, and he was longing more and more to have her bright presence about his hearth.

He was brought to the point one morning by Tossy, who was walking round the garden with him before he started for Stokeland.

"What are you going to do to-day, old woman?" he asked her.

"It is a half-holiday, I don't know exactly. Wouldn't you take us down with you

again?" she said, swinging his hand to and fro as they walked.

"Down where?" he said, rather absently.

"To Stokeland, and let us go and see Miss Alwyn; there are plenty more flowers, and she did like them so."

"You like her, then?" he said, smiling.

"Yes, papa dear, oh so much," said the unsuspecting Tossy. "Flo and I often think we wish she lived here instead of Miss"—

"Hush, there she comes. Good-bye and be a good girl. I do not think I can take you to-day, but perhaps you can go another week."

And he kissed her, and handed her over to the governess who had come to find her.

When he rapped at Miss Alwyn's door he was so nervous that he almost hoped that the maid who opened it would say that she was out. No, Miss Alwyn was at home, and he walked in and found her sitting at work. He was relieved that she was employed with

braids and cottons, and such feminine properties, for it seemed to make her more accessible and put him at his ease.

Except that her fingers trembled a little, she was perfectly cool and collected to all outward appearance, and went on steadily with her stitching as they talked.

"You have a very pleasant home here," he observed, after some indifferent conversation. "Have you been here long?"

"Ten years last winter, long enough to have become very fond of my little hermitage."

"Tossy and Flo told me about your pretty things; they knew where your pictures and busts were exactly, and gave me a detailed account of all they saw; I hope they were not troublesome?"

"Oh, no," answered Miss Alwyn, "they were very good and nice. How fond you must be of them."

She would like to have said a great deal more about them, but delicacy kept her silent.

"They are a great responsibility," said he, "I wish that I had some one who would share it."

Miss Alwyn busily sewed a piece of braid on the wrong way, but made no remark. She was dreadfully uncomfortable, and ready to wish that she had never seen Mr. Harvard. His attentions had been so pleasant and flattering, but this was something very different ; what should she do or say ?

"They are very obedient children," said Mr. Harvard, "but a man is so stupid about girls ; at the present moment I have no idea whether the right thing is to keep them at home or send them to school. Which do you think would be best for them ?"

"I should not send them away yet," said Miss Alwyn, plucking up her courage. "It is difficult to find a good school, and they are very young to be sent among girls of whom you can know nothing. I expect they are happier at home with you than they would be among strangers."

"We should all be happier if we could get something we want," said he. "Miss Alwyn, will you not come and be my wife? We all love you, and will do all in our power to please you. I have thought so much of it that I do not know how to do without you; you have taken my whole heart. You will come to us?"

He had risen from his chair and was standing on the hearthrug, and as he ended, she rose too and stood confronting him from a little distance off.

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Harvard," she said, "but I do not see how it can be."

"Why not? what obstacle is there? Is your objection to me or is there any other difficulty?"

She looked up at him with a momentary glance; he was certainly not a man to whom any woman was likely to object, and even in her confusion she was proud to think of him as her suitor; he was as distinguished-look-

ing as he was worthy, and even at this trying moment of his life did not look in the least foolish.

"There can be no objection to you," she answered, "to be your wife would be far more than I deserve, but it comes too late, too late by twenty years. Mr. Harvard, I am forty-six."

"And I am forty-two," he said, with a gleam of amusement in his grave dark eyes. "Surely you do not consider me old?"

"You? oh, no! but with women it is different; I am so used to be independent that I am afraid I should make a bad wife."

"I know better than that," said he. "But I have surprised you; think it over and then give me an answer, and it must be 'Yes.'"

He said the last few words not dictatorially, but imploringly, and taking up his hat, he bade her good-bye.

His business at the mills was ended before he went to Miss Alwyn's, and as there was yet an hour before his train would start, he

resolved to beg a cup of tea at Mrs. Miller's. To his dismay he found on being shown into the drawing-room that Mrs. Miller was not alone, but was entertaining two ladies. Mrs. Willoughby, the elder of the twain, was the widow of Lady Vanner's chaplain, who had died a year or two ago.

Mrs. Willoughby, with flattering persistency, had formed herself upon the model of her patroness while sojourning at the Park which adjoins Stokeland, and unluckily Lady Vanner was not a very good model for her. Sprung from a noble family, she began life with manners gentle and courteous enough for a princess ; when she married, however, she was thrown into a circle of second-rate fast men and women—a sporting set where loud voices obtained and where a confident air and slangy tone were *de rigueur*, and she gradually came to resemble her husband's friends.

Mrs. Willoughby's voice was also loud and her conversation brusque and bold, and she

had not the aristocratic grace which Lady Vanner had never quite lost.

The moment there was a chance this lady addressed Mr. Harvard, whom she had met at Mrs. Miller's on previous occasions.

"Well, and what is going on at Fulham? Does anything ever go on there?"

"I believe about the usual number of events, Mrs. Willoughby," answered Mr. Harvard, "we are sometimes born, and occasionally we die there, and I do not know that there is much to be said about us between times. Oh, yes, I forgot, we have an occasional murder; there was one last week."

"Heard nothing of it," said Mrs. Willoughby. "Never read the papers; if there is any news one is sure to hear it, and if not you are saved the trouble."

"I like to know what is going on," simpered Miss Masters, the other lady.

"Well, I always like to see the births, deaths, and marriages, but I have not time

for much else, with all the children," said Mrs. Miller.

"How can you be bothered with them all day?" asked the chaplain's widow; "poor Charles liked to have our Adolphus always about with him, but I keep him in the nursery till lunch time."

"Mrs. Stunt's children are beautifully managed," put in Miss Masters—she was a young lady with a fair complexion and pretty light hair, and her chief glory in life was the acquaintance of the Stunts, a family of manufacturers who held their heads rather high in Stokeland. Had Miss Masters been addicted to mental analysis, she would have discovered that the sweetest drop in the pleasure of the Stunts' acquaintance lay in the fact that they kept a carriage and pair. When that well-appointed vehicle, with its high-stepping horses, and coachman and footman, pulled up at the door of Miss Masters' dwelling, her cup was indeed full.

These two ladies were both high in Mrs.

Miller's favour, and she had not scrupled to recommend them to her husband's partner as eligible helpmeets. He shuddered as he surveyed them, and was more and more determined not to let Miss Alwyn escape him. He thought of her sitting in her parlour, with signs of culture and refinement on every side. What could these women understand of the things which he and she understood and loved? What were art and high-thinking to such as these? To Mrs. Willoughby culture and refinement meant a French cook and costly upholstery, and a clever dressmaker; and Miss Masters' idea of it was expressed by the Stunts' carriage and pair. What should he find to say to either of them through the long winter evenings? He imagined Tossy's grave eyes summing up such a step-mother as one of these, and finding her wanting, with sorrowful premature wisdom. He had at first been attracted somewhat by Miss Masters' pretty face and soft manner, but one evening in her

society had cured him, Mr. Harvard being one of those exceptional men who desired a wife with brains.

"Why didn't you send the dear little girls to see me when they were here the other day?" asked good-natured Mrs. Miller, who had no suspicion of the object of Tossy and Flo's visit.

"There was not much time; they will be pleased to come another day," said Mr. Harvard, feeling that the conversation was trenching on dangerous ground, and hurriedly finishing his tea.

"What did they do with themselves, then, all the time you were with Mr. Miller?"

"They went to see a friend of theirs," answered Mr. Harvard, making his adieus.

"Bless me! I didn't know they knew anybody in the place," cried Mrs. Miller.

Mr. Harvard appeared not to hear this last remark—at least he gave no answer, but made his escape into the hall, protesting

that he could let himself out without troubling Mrs. Miller.

"I saw the little girls carrying some baskets down Anchor Street," said Mrs. Willoughby.

"Down Anchor Street!" exclaimed Mrs. Miller, mentally reviewing the inhabitants, and wondering at which house they had stopped.

"Surely," she said to herself, "he can't have taken up with that dowdy little old maid, Miss Alwyn!" but she did not impart this idea to her visitors.

Mr. Harvard's visit left Miss Alwyn in a state of great mental perplexity. So sincerely and entirely had she renounced all idea of marriage, that this offer had turned her world upside down. She had prized her independence so highly that she could not renounce it without a keen struggle. Still she could not help acknowledging to herself that she had not felt nearly so independent

since she had seen Mr. Harvard—and the children—they tugged at her heartstrings. In the evening she would make up her mind, at all hazards, to be free—to do her own work and lead her own life—and in the morning she would feel that she could not send her lover away for ever—that she would be a fool to refuse this proffered happiness. In this state of indecision a letter from Mr. Harvard found her, some three days after he had asked her to be his wife; it ran thus—

“ Fulham, 18—

“ MY DEAR MISS ALWYN,—

“ I write to ask for your answer to my question of Tuesday, and I have some things to say which I did not find words to say then. I could not tell you how much I esteem and love you, and how dearly welcome you would be if you would consent to be my wife and my children's mother. I know that you are not like other women in

desiring marriage for its own sake—you are so strong that you can stand alone, and are so endowed with inward wealth that you can afford to despise what the world prizes. And yet I cannot help thinking that marriage is a higher state than celibacy, and has deeper duties, and that if you can feel it right to enter it, you will not repent your choice. This new life need not in any way stand in opposition to your art, which is my delight as well as yours. I think we might all be very happy together, and do some good work in the world if you would trust yourself to me. Do not leave me long without an answer—and yet I would not hurry you; if you have still any doubts I will wait as patiently as I may till they are gone.

“Yours ever affectionately,

“JOHN HARVARD.”

She shrank from writing Yes; and yet she could not bring herself to write No. How well he understood her—this new friend.

She, too, had learnt to know him at once, and he had never seemed a stranger to her. She had seen no other man whom she could so trust; no other who seemed to her so well worth loving with the deep, steady love of a woman who has lived and suffered.

That day and the next passed, and she sent no answer, and on the following evening, as she was sitting in the dusk thinking, Mr. Harvard came. She stood up to receive him, and offered him a chair, but he took no notice of it, and went straight to the point.

“ You will promise to come to my home ? ” he said, “ I could not wait any longer, so I came to ask your answer ; if you do not say no, I shall understand that you will come.”

She looked into his face ; it was pale and marked with care, and all in a moment she decided. She sat down by the fire—it was a chill November evening—and he sat down near her, and a great sense of peace and comfort came over her. The wind was blustering outside, and rain began to patter

against the window, but it pleased her to hear it; the warmth within was all the better, and she need fear no more storms.

Only when he rose to go, it troubled her.

"You will get wet," she said anxiously, "have you not a great-coat?"

He kissed her on the forehead, and smiled with tears in his eyes.

"God bless you, my darling," he said, "it is so long since any one has cared whether I was wet or dry. Yes, I left my coat outside."

After that evening she never had a doubt whether she was right to marry Mr. Harvard.

The next morning Alicia Howe came in in very low spirits.

"I am in such a bad temper, Aunt Bessie, that I have come to see you."

"An odd reason for a visit, my dear. I wonder what would happen if I chanced to be in another bad temper; we should have been certain to quarrel."

"I do not believe you ever are out of

humour," said Alicia ; " perhaps you would be though, if you had such trials as I have."

" And what is the matter to-day ? "

" Oh ! nothing particular, only that I am a square girl in a round hole ; I was not meant to be a Quaker, and I do not like it."

" What would you like to have been ? "

" I don't know."

" It strikes me that what you really want is something to do."

" But then I have the misfortune to be a woman, and what is to become of a woman who hates district visiting and Sunday schools and amateur art, and sermons— at least most of them. I think if I had been a man I would have painted in earnest, or—no, I would have been a sculptor as Clare Welsman is going to be. You are the only person I can really speak my mind to, Aunt Bessie, and what I should do without you, I cannot imagine."

" I wish I could find some other friend for you, darling."

"But as long as I have you, I do not want another," said Alicia, staring.

"It might happen that some day I might go away," said Miss Alwyn.

"Oh! Aunt Bessie, you could not be so wicked!"

"Whatever happens you and I will always be friends," she answered.

"Oh! what is it?" cried Alicia, forgetting her other woes in a new alarm. But when Miss Alwyn told her what had happened, she could not but acknowledge through her tears that it was well.

"And then you will forget all about me!" she said; but she did not believe that it would be so, and she kissed Miss Alwyn very warmly and wished her all happiness.

It was a severe blow to her, however, to lose Miss Alwyn from Stokeland. Launched at her birth, like Gulielma, on the clear tranquil waters of Quakerism, Alicia was always longing for crisper waves and a more resplendent sunshine. She loved the society

of artists rather than of saints, for which let no man blame her, God having made both saints and artists. The Quaker mode of speech and thought and dress, never ceased to strike her as something foreign to her, familiar as it was, and well as she loved those of whom it was a part.

CHAPTER XII.

LAUNCHED.

THE wedding of Mr. Harvard and Miss Alwyn was a very quiet one, for on different accounts they were both indisposed for gaiety. Miss Alwyn was greatly troubled at parting with her Stokeland friends, and there were many tears shed on the day she went away. One thing she had done which gave her entire satisfaction : she had secured Clare Welsman's future, and greatly against her inclination, his aunt had yielded her consent to his going to London to study.

"The life of a sculptor is open to so much temptation," Mrs. Welsman had said.

"Is it?" said Miss Alwyn drily; "my dear Mrs. Welsman, if you want that boy to go to the bad thoroughly and entirely, thwart his passion for Art, and make him a lawyer or a clergyman or a trader. He is a good lad

but he has a strong temperament and with you the responsibility of his future lies."

And Mrs. Welsman had listened and trembled and at last yielded, and it was settled that in six months' time, on his leaving the Grammar School, Clare should go to London.

"Strange doings at Mrs. Howe's, ma'am," said Mary to Mrs. Welsman one morning, when she was clearing away the breakfast table, "I hear that Robert has given notice."

"How is that?" asked Mrs. Welsman.

"It is all that Hetty's temper," said Mary indignantly; "I daresay ma'am you'll tell me that I can always see the moth in everybody's else's eye, but it is the truth for all that."

"What did they quarrel about this time?"

"As far as I can make out, it was about Mr. Perfect's meeting. I daresay you knew ma'am, he was a going there to a meeting as some gentlemen wanted to hold about the niggers."

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Welsman, "I had a notice, but I could not go to it; I think I had a school meeting that evening."

"It seems the servants was had in to hear all about it, and when the gentleman had spoke, Mr. Perfect, he knelt down to pray, and Robert was a kneeling next him as it fell out. It was rather warm, and the winder into the garden was open, and while they were all as serious as could be, in come Black Bess, Miss Gulie's cat, and sniffed about from this 'un to that 'un, and then she up and jumped on Mr. Perfect's back to find out what were going on. He shook her off quiet-like, and went on as if nothink hadn't happened, but Robert he see it and burst out a laughing. Nobody didn't take any notice in the droring-room, but when they got back in the kitchen, Hetty flew into such a temper and abuged Robert to that degree, that Mrs. Howe come out to see what ever was up, and then Hetty begun crying, and Robert said he couldn't abear his life, and the upshoots of

it all was that Mrs. Howe said one of 'em must leave. So Robert is to go at the end of next week, when his month is up, and Hetty stops on a while to see how she'll behave."

"It is very tiresome for Mrs. Howe," said Mrs. Welsman, naturally looking at the affair from the point of view of the mistress of a house.

"And very hard on the poor lad," said Mary, whose sympathies were warmly enlisted on the side of Robert, and who was not averse to descant on the failings of a rival and contemporary, in spite of her acquaintance with Holy Writ.

"Are the Miss Howes still away?" asked Clare, who had been collecting his books while this narration had gone on. "I shall scarcely see them before I leave, and they were to have two of the canaries."

Clare's time for going to London had now come very near, for he was to settle in during the following week, and was already hard at work preparing for the change. He was

not sorry to leave home as a youth under happier auspices would have been. He left behind no bright circle of brothers and sisters, no tender parents, and his aunt's house had often been very dull to him. She had always been kind—she had even been indulgent, but she had been strangely reserved and chary of tenderness; he would miss good old Mary more than his aunt. And he had now thrown off the boy and was longing to go out into the world.

The two girl Howes had been spending the winter at Nice, and Mrs. Howe had not seen them for some months. It was the longest time they had ever spent from home, but Alicia's chest had showed signs of weakness in the early autumn, and as a sister of Mrs. Howe's was taking her own family to the Riviera, it was arranged that the two girls should join them. Poor Mrs. Howe, involved in the domestic griefs related by Mary, was longing for their return now, and they were to arrive early in May.

It was the evening before the day which had been fixed for Clare's departure, and he finished a round of leave-takings at Mrs. Howe's. She was fond of the lad, and thought sometimes that she would have liked her Sydney to have had such a face and bearing as Clare Welsman, if he had lived to grow up.

"Have you secured comfortable lodgings in London?" she asked.

"My aunt likes them," answered he, "I am to live in a family; I would rather have lodged alone, because I am used to so much time to myself."

"Perhaps this plan will be best on the whole," remarked Mrs. Howe, "you would find solitary lodgings lonely in desolate London, especially at first."

"But I shall be out all day, and have so much to do that the quiet would be pleasant; but my aunt has arranged for the best, though," he added loyally, "I daresay it will be all right."

"Do not forget old friends," said Mrs. Howe, when he rose to bid her good-bye, "we shall always be glad to see you back."

"No indeed," said Clare, pressing her hand warmly, "remember me to Miss Howe and Miss Alicia, and tell them my aunt will send them the canaries I promised."

"How I wish I had had a mother!" said he to himself as he went up the street homewards.

CHAPTER XIII.

A FAMILY VISIT.

"Is it to-day that Amos Thompson is coming, mamma?" asked Alicia Howe one morning at breakfast.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Howe, "he is coming at three o'clock this afternoon."

"Then I think I shall go out," said Alicia, "I do so dislike it."

"I desire that thee will be present, dear; I should not like thee to treat Amos Thompson disrespectfully when he feels it right to come."

"Oh! but he need not know there is such a person at all," said Alicia, discontentedly, "surely two of you will be enough."

"My dear, I hope thee will be present, to please me."

"I am always afraid they will say some-

thing to me, and it makes me nervous," said Alicia.

"What should he say that could do thee any harm?" asked Gulie, laughing, "Amos Thompson is the kindest man, and it always soothes me to hear him preach."

"Oh yes! that is different; I like his preaching. It is sitting down in that dreadful way that I do not like—I am in terror that something will happen to me—that I shall suddenly feel called to pray or preach, or something of that sort."

"That is not required of all," said her mother, "and if it were thy duty thou wouldst be made willing no doubt."

At the appointed time the expected visitor appeared. He was an old white-haired man, dressed in plainly cut clothes, with a snowy handkerchief round his neck, and his face wore a calm and kindly expression. He was engaged in a round of family visits, a kind of spiritual work, once more common in the Society of Friends than at present, and con-

sisting of interviews with separate families with suitable admonitions to each.

For some time there was silence in the drawing-room where Amos Thompson and the Howes were sitting together, and then in a gentle measured voice the old man began speaking. At first he administered general advice and encouragement, then he went on to "speak to states," and told how it was borne in upon his mind that there was one in that family who had work to do for the Lord in an unlooked-for manner. Alicia raised her eyes to his face—his own were rivetted on the ground as he spoke—and thought how different their worlds were, and wondered why she always felt an outsider among her fellow-worshippers. All through her life Quaker thought and Quaker practice had seemed strange to her, and the current of her instincts set full against the hereditary faith of her house. Yet she had been reared precisely as her sister had, and their friends and acquaintances were the same. With

Gulielma it was altogether different and by habit character and conviction she was a Quaker. She sat this afternoon with her hands lightly folded in her lap, her soft face a little drooped, listening with reverent pleased attention to the old man's words, much as a novice might listen to some venerable father of her Church.

As Amos Thompson spoke of that service which he deemed required at the hands of one there, a startled flood of colour suffused her face, but she did not raise her eyes or move her hands, and when he ceased speaking she still sat motionless.

The whole interview did not last for half an hour, and the visitor departed as quietly as he had come, after a few words of general conversation in which no allusion was made to what had gone before.

"Did I not say he would talk about somebody preaching? they always do," said Alicia to her sister.

"It must be a cross to those that are

called to preach," said Gulielma thoughtfully.

"I am sure I should never know what to say," answered Alicia, "I should break down in the middle."

"Not if words were given thee to speak," said Gulielma, and then they went upstairs to dress for walking, but though Gulielma said no more, the old man's words had sunk deeply into her heart, and she could not shake off their influence.

CHAPTER XIV.

HETTY'S FORTUNE.

THERE was peace in the Howes' kitchen for some time after Robert's departure. There was almost too entire a peace, for it was so foreign to Hetty's nature to abstain from scolding altogether, that those who knew her well feared that such excessive calm boded no good. Nor were their fears altogether groundless.

"Mamma," said Alicia, one day when she had been into the kitchen to order dinner, "I wish you would go and speak to Hetty; she does nothing but sit in a chair and cry."

"What is the matter with her?" asked Mrs. Howe.

"I cannot make out—though I have asked her all sorts of questions. All she says is that she is 'unked.'"

Mrs. Howe hastened to the afflicted Hetty whose tears flowed afresh at the sight of her mistress.

"Why Hetty, what is all this?" asked Mrs. Howe, looking with dismay at the unwashed breakfast cups and the general disorder of Hetty's kingdom.

"Please, ma'am," sobbed the latter, "I've been trying to make up my mind to tell you and I couldn't."

Mrs. Howe rapidly revolved in her brain the divers crimes that Hetty might have committed; could she have broken the chandelier in the drawing-room? no—Mrs. Howe had just seen it intact; the old Worcester teapot with its attendant cups was also safe and sound. Had some tramps come to the back door and stolen the silver spoons? Mrs. Howe was inclining to the latter theory, when Hetty broke out afresh.

"You was always such a good mistress and the young ladies too, that I can't abear the thought of leaving you."

"Leaving us!" cried her mistress, aghast,
"why should you leave us?"

"I want a change ma'am; I feel so unked now."

No other explanation could be wrested from her and her resolution remained unshaken, in spite of fresh floods of tears as the end of her month approached.

She had left Stokeland about six months, when one evening, to the surprise of the household, she appeared, dressed in a style of unwonted elegance, and looking bashful but not unhappy.

Mrs. Howe and Alicia had a private interview with her in the drawing-room, and inquired with interest as to her prospects and present situation.

"I do not think of going into service again," said Hetty looking rather confused;
"I left my place on Wednesday."

"Why Hetty," said Alicia laughing; "are you going to get married?"

"Well, I did think of it, miss," answered

Hetty; "at least we are keeping company, and he wants it to be soon."

"You must tell us who it is," said Mrs. Howe, "is it any one that we know?"

"Yes," simpered Hetty, "please ma'am it's Robert."

"Robert!" was all that Alicia could exclaim. Mrs. Howe was struck dumb by this extraordinary matrimonial announcement.

"And you think that you will be happy together?" she managed to say at last.

"No fear of that, ma'am," said Hetty, "we do suit one another so nice. Robert's aunt, she has left him a bit of money. I have got my little savings, and we are going to live up in London, and let lodgings, and we shall be very glad of a good word from you, either on you, ma'am."

"We will do anything we can for you, and I hope you will be successful," answered Mrs. Howe, privately wondering how long it would be before Robert's head would be

broken, and commiserating the lodgers in posse.

The bride was nearly twenty years older than the bridegroom; they had quarrelled violently during the whole time that they were at Mrs. Howe's together; to all outward appearance there could scarcely have been a more incongruous marriage; but in spite of all this, it turned out that Hetty was right—they did suit each other, and had discovered after Robert left that they could not do without each other. The lodgings they let were some of the best in London, and the cat was never known to devour the lodgers' salmon, or their bills to grow of their own accord while lying in the kitchen.

Their first and favourite lodger was a certain sculptor named Jack Hardwicke, and he always looked on them as a remarkable instance of connubial felicity, an article in which Mr. Hardwicke had not unwavering faith as a rule.

CHAPTER XV.

GULIELMA.

It was a troubled time with Gulielma Howe, and she was sorely tossed about in her mind through those Spring days while the earth was budding and stirring with silent life. There was within her soul, too, a hidden germ that was ever growing in the darkness, and would one day bear flower and fruit. Dared she hinder that celestial growth by her self-seeking and love of this world? She felt within herself that there could be no happiness for her if she turned a deaf ear to the voice within her, and yet the flesh was weak, and the sacrifice very great. "If only I might escape—if only this one thing need not be required of me!" was her daily and nightly prayer. There could be no doubt of the end in a nature such as hers, but the end was not yet, and meanwhile the struggle was hard.

Not only did she shrink from such a step—its publicity—the burden it involved—but she felt with fatal clearness that she must offer up her love, and she had come to love Norman Smith with all her still, deep heart.

“How quiet Gulie is,” said Alicia one day to the mother, “I cannot make her out. She sits thinking for hours and hours, and she does not seem well.”

“I think perhaps a change would do her good—the spring weather is trying, and she does so much visiting among the sick.”

“Perhaps she would like to go to Aunt Susanna’s; shall I ask her, mother?”

“If thou likest, my dear.”

The proposition came at first like a welcome respite to Gulielma, and she caught at it eagerly; but that night a strong exercise of mind came upon her, and she felt that the crisis of her life was near. When the next day her mother and Alicia talked of the visit, and the letter to be written, and the journey, she scarcely spoke. She was not her own,

and must stay or go as she was taught by the witness within her.

It was the day of Stokeland Meeting, which was held on Thursday mornings, and, with a strange tremor of heart, Gulielma prepared herself for it. There were not many present, for some of the men of business could not come, and others would not, and certain of the mothers found it difficult to attend, and the weekday gathering was a standing trouble to the most earnest spirits, from its scanty numbers. On this particular day there was Thomas Lamb and his wife, and five of the Allens, and two of the Bevingtons, and three strangers, with a few stragglers from other families, and the Meeting-house looked gaunt and empty.

The customary silence did not last long, for one of the strangers, a pale middle-aged woman, knelt and prayed, in a quavering falsetto key, for light and guidance, and when she had resumed her seat for a short time, she rose to preach. There were those pre-

sent, she said, who were not faithful to the inward call—who were striving against light and knowledge. “Oh! my brother. Oh! my sister,” she cried, “resist not the Spirit! now is the accepted time! The Lord requires a service at thy hands, which thou alone canst render. He has spoiled thy pleasant pictures, it may be, and brought thy soul into tribulation till thou hast bowed down thy head like a bulrush. It is that He might raise thee up, and be gracious to thee, and cause thee to drink of the river of His pleasures a soul-satisfying draught. Only be thou faithful to His heavenly calling, and testify what great things He has done for thy soul.”

Every word went straight to Gulielma Howe's heart. She had no manner of doubt now, for these two separate times the message had come to her, and her way lay clear before her. The spirit of her forefathers was within her—the spirit of those who had given up houses and lands, and brethren, for the Truth's sake; who had lain in dungeons,

filthy and vermin-haunted, and suffered beyond belief, rather than keep silence and compound with iniquity ; the spirit of those despised Quakers of old, who, amid the foul and stagnant waters of spiritual sloth, and evil living, and greedy priestcraft, lit up a clear flame that burns to this our day. What was her poor offering, she thought, that she should shrink and draw back ?

As the preacher sat down, Gulielma lifted her whole soul up a living sacrifice, and then, scarcely knowing what she did, not knowing at all what words she should speak, she stood up among her kinsfolk and old acquaintance to give God's message. As she stood there in her place, all fear left her and all pain, and in a sweet low voice she began speaking. A ray of sunshine stole in through the high window, and touched her dress and hair. She looked as the gentle St. Dorothea may, when she gave the young lawyer her heavenly roses, as the pagans slew her, and was indeed of the kindred of all faithful souls in every

land and age. Her words were few and simple, but she never faltered in her speech, and it seemed to her that none of what she spoke was hers ; she did but give the message entrusted to her, and a great peace filled her soul. She was wrapt into a higher state, and had overcome the world. The voices of the babbling crowd could not touch her ; even her love was a thing far off ; and when she reached home, and her mother kissed her and blessed her, she wept tears of joy.

“ May the Lord keep thee faithful, my child,” said Elizabeth Howe, with answering tears in her own eyes, “ I thank Him that He should have thought fit to honour a daughter of mine by making her His messenger.”

Alicia received this new event with awe and a touch of sorrow. Gulielma was slipping from her ; first her love and now her faith made a gulf between them, and though her sister was more loving to her than ever, a sense of painful loneliness had stolen over Alicia. She grew less content than ever with

the creed in which she had been brought up—that creed so favourable to Goodness, so unfavourable to Art.

Gulielma had felt throughout that in yielding to her inward call she was renouncing Norman Smith. She thought of him again and again, as he had appeared at Mrs. Miller's, as she had seen him at other times, and the prevailing image of him in her mind was of a man fond of pleasure and somewhat conventional in his tastes and bearing—certainly one whom the thought of a preacher wife would at once repel. Consequently when next she met him, her manner was constrained and stiff, and meeting with him became a painful rather than a pleasurable event.

CHAPTER XVI.

MARIA BEVINGTON MAKES A DISCOVERY.

THE Bevingtons' house was the very home and temple of neatness. I do not recollect whether there was a god or goddess of Order in the circles of Olympus, but if such a deity existed, no mortals would have stood higher in his favour than the sister Bevingtons and their brother Eli. The best sitting-room in particular was aggravatingly tidy. The carpet was of a grey shade, with an oak leaf pattern running across it; the sofa and chairs were of horsehair, clean and slippery; the table-cloths on the two round tables were green, and on one of them a few books were laid in orderly rotation; there was a mahogany book-case of a straightness and plainness undreamt of by the ordinary cabinet-maker, and it was filled with ranks of sober books, records of long-past worthies, for the most

part belonging to a devout sad-coloured world in which it is difficult to realize that human passions and loves and endeavours had a part. A clock in a black case ticked softly on the mantel-piece, which was of white marble, and on either side of it stood a dark, stone vase and a candlestick. The only thing in the room approaching to litter was a work-basket of Sophia Bevington's covered with a small, green silk counterpane; this, as a necessary evil, was sometimes allowed to stand upon the table, with a reel or two of cotton and a pair of scissors beside it if she happened to be at work. When first you were introduced to this room and its hardly less precise companions, they struck you as so quaint and curious that they pleased you, but those persons who stayed in the house were sometimes painfully oppressed by its regularity, and longed inexpressibly for a few careless flowers, a stray sheet of music, or a pile of papers or magazines with news of the great world without. Not that flowers were

absent—there was always a particular vase in a particular spot on the side table, but it partook of the general precision, and they never looked like other people's flowers.

Maria Bevington, who was an invalid, and whose journeys were confined to a visit to the Meeting twice a week in a Bath chair, was lying on the sofa one evening, and Sophia sat near her working, in company with the afore-mentioned basket, when their housemaid announced Norman Smith.

When Norman was in Stokeland, he made a point of calling at the Bevingtons', for they were old friends of his mother's, and from time to time invited him to tea. In spite of their peculiarities, he had a warm liking for them all, and Eli Bevington and he had a kindred weakness for collecting eggs and stuffing birds, and had many points upon which to compare notes.

"Eli is gone out this evening," said Sophia, "he will be so sorry to have missed thee, he has found a king-fisher under the North Mill

bridge, and he wished to tell thee about it and show thee the bird."

"How long is it since thee were in Stoke-land?" asked Maria.

"I have not been here for a month," answered he, "how is every one going on? I have not heard any Stokeland news for an age."

"Then thee have not been told that we have a new minister?"

"No; who is that! Surely Thomas Lamb has not begun to preach? I can't think of any one else."

"What do thee think of Gulie Howe?" asked Maria rather sharply—she was not so pleasant-tempered as Sophia—looking at Norman with curiosity.

"Gulie Howe! what of her?" said Norman flushing hotly.

"She has begun to speak in Meeting," said Sophia; "last Fourth Day she preached very acceptably, and friends hope that she will be favoured to continue; she is a very sweet young woman."

Norman sat speechless. He had dreaded to hear that some other had stepped in and claimed his love, but this news was almost as fatal to his dreams. Quaker tradition and usage made women's preaching familiar to him, but he could not reconcile the idea with his experience of Gulielma. She was the ideal of a chaste and devout maiden, a spotless flower of womanhood, but a preacher, a leader of others ! it shocked all his preconceived notions of her, and made him feel unhappy and astray.

"What has led to it?" he asked at last.

"I do not know—the dear child is of a reserved temperament and does not speak much of herself. The day she preached a ministering friend had made allusion to some one in the meeting who was called to bear testimony, but whether Gulielma had been led to think of it before that, I have not heard."

"She had not looked well for several weeks," said the keen-eyed Maria from her sofa, "pale and thin as if she had something on her

mind." She was privately possessed of the idea that Norman had been trifling with Gulielma's affections, and was desirous of making him as uncomfortable as circumstances would permit.

Innocent as he was of the conduct she imputed to him, he was uncomfortable enough to have gratified his worst enemy. Gulielma seemed stolen from him, not by any earthly lover, but removed into another region. Such a one as he could not look for her love, he thought in the humility of his heart, and he went away very desponding.

"I cannot avoid thinking that Norman has gained Gulielma's affections," said Maria, after he left. "I noticed how often he spent First Day in Stokeland in the autumn, and several times he walked home with her."

"But why dost thou think he has gained her affections? that is scarcely a proof of it, by itself."

"I always notice their manner when they

hear each other's names ; how he reddened to-day when we spoke of her."

"Perhaps he is attached to her. It would be very suitable if they should be drawn to each other."

"If he is, why do not they come to an understanding, Sophy? I do not like such dilatory proceedings."

"Perhaps, dear, he is afraid to speak ; thou knowest he has nothing to depend on but his salary."

"Then why does he come following her about?"

"I cannot tell," answered Sophia smiling, "but we must not be too hard on young folks ; I do not think Norman would act wrongly." And she put away the silk-covered basket, with its reels and needles and tapes and scissors in irreproachable order, and took down one of her religious biographies from its place. It was a long record of preachings and imprisonments and buffetings

for conscience' sake, and sometimes made Sophia rather uneasy; she wondered what kind of martyr she should have made, doubting whether she should have borne herself bravely, and to her imagination the most prominent horror was the dirt and disorder of those old prisons; she thought she could have suffered hanging or beheading, but at the filth of Newgate her faith staggered.

"I wish thee would not read," said Maria, "I want to talk more about these young people; dost thou not think we could find out what ails them?"

But further discussion of that interesting topic was impossible, for Eli at that moment entered with a piece of news that diverted the attention of both the sisters.

"There is a strange report in the town," he said, "something is wrong with Carew's Bank, and there has been a robbery it is thought. I am afraid it is true, for Thomas, their old clerk acknowledged there was foundation for the talk and he knows all about their affairs."

"And what is said?" asked Maria; "I wish thou wert not so deliberate, Eli."

But to hurry Eli, was only to retard his progress.

He was a man of sixty or thereabouts, and was dressed in a long cloth coat reaching nearly to his heels with a white neckhandkerchief arranged scarf fashion, and he had an impediment in his speech which rendered him a tantalizing reporter of exciting news. By dint of an exercise of patience however, his sisters learnt that Mr. Farrer, the manager of the Stokeland branch of Carew's Bank, was said to have made too free with the accounts of the customers, and with the connivance of the head cashier had applied a thousand pounds to his own purposes.

"And is he in custody?" asked Maria.

"I believe he has escaped," answered her brother. "It only came out to-day, and I do not think many persons have heard of it yet."

"Poor misguided man!" said Sophia.
"What could have led to his fall?"

"Henry Thomas says that he hears he had been in the habit of betting on horse races, and had lost large sums of money."

"That is a folly which I cannot conceive any one indulging in," said Maria; "there can be no possible excuse for it."

Ah Maria, there are more fiery temptations to the strugglers in the working world than can ever visit that cool secluded couch in your spotless house!

Sophia was thinking something like that, for she said gently—

"We must recollect, dear, that we are told not to judge our brethren."

"Well, so we are," said Maria; "it is a good thing for Thomas Farrer that I have not got to judge him, for I am afraid I should not have much mercy on him."

"I should not be afraid t—t—t—to leave him in thy hands," stuttered Eli, smiling.

CHAPTER XVII.

REQUIESCAT IN PACE.

CLARE WELSMAN had been in London for about a year when one morning he was summoned home by a note from Mrs. Howe, reporting that his aunt was dangerously ill. He had been home for a few days and had spent some weeks at the seaside with her, since he had left her house, and she had twice complained of slight illness, but there had been nothing to alarm him ; all she had suffered from was shortness of breath and faintness, both of which symptoms her doctor attributed to her having overworked herself as she was always doing. It was a great shock to him to hear this bad news, for though his aunt was less dear to him than either Miss Alwyn or Mary, as I have said, there is a bond in kindred unlike any other, and she

was his sole kinswoman and had cared for and tended him in his childhood.

He wrote a hasty line, naming the train he would arrive by and took it to the telegraph office, and in two hours' time was on his way. At the Stokeland station, the first person he saw was Alicia Howe. To his alarm and amazement, she put both her hands in his and said not a word, and the tears were running down her cheeks. He staggered back against a pillar and the station turned round and round before his giddy brain.

"Is she—?" he could not say more.

"She died at four this morning," said Alicia, and she took his arm and led him away.

It was all like a dream to Clare. The house was closely veiled; Mrs. Howe was sitting in the darkened drawing-room and kissed him on the forehead when he went in. Mary was sobbing as she went about her necessary work, and there was a strange hush in the house. He sank into a chair and burst

into tears. How desolate he was! how utterly forlorn! and the blow was so sudden that his brain was in a whirl. Presently he went upstairs and there cold and severely beautiful was the one face that was akin to him. He had never known before how much he had loved his aunt in spite of that thick veil between them, and they were true tears that he wept over her death-bed.

The days went on dimly and swiftly till they bore Mrs. Welsman away for ever. There was no one bidden to the funeral, and the only mourners beside Clare were Mrs. Howe and Alicia, Mary and Mr. Thorpe, the banker, whom the dead lady had appointed her sole executor. Mr. Perfect read the service, and many members of his congregation attended: they had sustained an irreparable loss, and the vicar of St. John's thought with despair of the collapse in the parish machinery which had taken place. In the afternoon the Will was read, and it was found

that after one or two legacies had been paid, the whole of her small property was left to "her kinsman Clare Welsman," as he was styled, in the care of her executor till he should be of age, and then to become his unconditionally.

Mrs. Howe would gladly have entertained Clare at her house, but he longed to be again at work, and in a few days went back to London till such time as his presence should be necessary to the settlement of his aunt's affairs, and Mary and a young girl were left in charge of the desolate house, till such time as it should be let to strangers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CAREW'S NEW MANAGER.

THE ascent of a steep mountain peak is difficult and dangerous; a false step may be fatal, and the traveller's powers are on the stretch; but there is the excitement of exertion, the stimulus of the keen air, and it may be doubted whether the long weary walk over an apparently endless level does not strain both limb and temper more severely.

Gulielma Howe had made her steep ascent over sharp, painful rocks and across gaping chasms, and now she was plodding along the dusty highway with an ache at heart sometimes as her companion, in spite of the peaceful sense of fulfilled duty. She felt assured that she had been right in her estimate of Norman Smith, for they met less and less often, and when she encountered him he made no effort to sit near her or speak to

her, neither did he avoid her as a man who was piqued or disappointed might have done; it was clear to Gulielma that he had ceased to care for her—perhaps he never had really cared.

She had frequently preached since that first time, and felt safe in a sense of blessedness, but there were days when things went hard with her, and she craved hungrily for the natural human love which she had been compelled to renounce. She was always unhappy after meeting Norman, and the dark eyes that had grown so dear to her held her many a night waking.

One Sunday he appeared at the Stokeland Meeting, and Gulielma was haunted all day by a sense of guilt because she had been unable to forget his presence, and had shrunk from uttering the prayer that rose to her lips. She had uttered it, and offered herself a living sacrifice, but she was nervously conscious of Norman's every movement, and when, after the meeting, he went away with-

out a word, her heart had beat with a rebellious pang.

Elizabeth Howe had watched Norman's apparent defection with a pain almost equal to her daughter's, but she was too high-minded a woman to lure back to her house an unwilling suitor. Had her daughter's lover persevered, for all his poverty, he would have been welcome, but as it was she could not lift a finger to attract him. Besides her faith was strong. "The Lord is mindful of His own" was to her an undoubted fact, and who dwelt nearer heaven than Gulielma, with her ever-deepening spiritual life?

Alicia was perplexed and confused by it all. She had been so jealous of Norman's influence with her sister, but now she almost wished him back to his allegiance. She was so tenderly sorry when she saw how pale and thin that sister was growing under the strain of conflicting emotions, and trembled at the pure, unearthly radiance of her look.

Was there no ministering angel ready to smooth the way and make the crooked straight? Such an angel was, indeed, ready, but she wore a white neckerchief and a brown stuff dress, and a plain cap, instead of shining robes and fleet pinions, and consequently she was not so sure and swift in her ministrations as an envoy from the higher spheres might have been. Added to her other human disabilities was the fact that Maria, her sister, had a dangerous tendency to say and do the wrong thing at a delicate crisis, and Sophy felt that her kindly offices must be, as far as possible, of a secret nature; and she resolved therefore to keep her own counsel, and watch her opportunity.

One Wednesday afternoon, a fair and well-ordered tea-table was set out in the Bevingtons' smaller parlour. They usually took their meals in this room, but it could not possibly be classed with an ordinary dining-room, and no one in the household had ever been known to call it so. It was furnished

in much the same way as its opposite neighbour, and had no distinct characteristic of its own, except that it was rather smaller in dimensions. In its spotless grey paint; the horsehair furniture; the white curtains; the pattern of the carpet; it exactly resembled the other sitting-room. The snowy cloth was covered with plentiful preparations for a hearty meal; there were plates of bread-and-butter, and currant cakes and pound cakes, and sauces of preserve, and racks of toast; it was evidently no apology for a tea with dinner in prospect, but the serious business of people who had dined early, and had had time to grow hungry again by six o'clock. The table was laid for seven, and there was a buzz of conversation in the opposite room, and a display of hats and wrappings in the best bedchamber, which proved that the expected company had arrived. The delicate white china cups, with gold rims, and tiny scattered brown roses, stood ranged in order, and the silver teapot was filled up. Sophia

Bevington, in her plum-coloured silk dress and grey twilled silk shawl, was adding finishing touches to the preparations, and had just despatched Susan to announce that all was ready, when there came a decided ring at the front door.

Sophia was more flurried by this sound than is usual for maiden ladies of sixty or thereabouts, and blushed like a girl.

“What shall I do if he has come to tea!” she said, running towards the door, and then back to the table. The fact is that this entertainment, innocent as it looked in outward appearance, was a deep-laid plot of Sophy’s, and the plot showed signs of breaking down at the outset.

After the conversation between herself and Maria, which was detailed in a previous chapter, Sophia Bevington had set her wits to work for the benefit of Norman and Gulielma. It was not easy to take any step in the matter from her ignorance of the real state of the case, and many months passed by

before she saw a prospect of action. She was convinced that her favourite cared for Gulielma, and she fancied that Gulielma cared for him; she was therefore sure that there must be some difficulty in the way—perhaps one of those impalpable clouds that obscure the sunshine of love, and which a stirring in the air might disperse. She would not entertain for a moment the idea that Norman had changed his mind, and resolved that if he had anything to say to his lady, she would do her best to give him a chance of saying it. She did not impart her scheme to Maria when at length she decided upon it, for Maria, besides being, as I have said, undiplomatic, was apt to be somewhat contradictory at times, and though she wished as well to Norman and Gulie as her sister, would probably oppose any plan for their benefit not originated by her own brain.

“My dear friend,” Sophy had once said to Mrs. Howe, in a pathetic burst of confidence, “I do not think I have proposed to

do six things in all my life without Maria saying 'Don't.' "

It all came about very simply by her happening to meet Lucy Allen in the street one morning, and hearing from her that Norman was coming over to Stokeland on the Wednesday following on business. Here was an opportunity made to her hand. She dared not venture to ask him to meet Gulie outright, but she would get Gulie to her house on Wednesday, when he was almost certain to run in; and "if way opened" they should meet.

She, therefore, on the spot went and invited Gulie and Alicia to spend the next evening with her and her sister, and then went home and informed the latter that she had done so.

"Why, Sophy, how could thee think of such a thing?" said Maria; "it is washing week. Thee must have forgotten it; and the whitewashers will be in the back kitchen.

Really, my dear, how thoughtless thee are; cannot thee put them off till next week?"

"It need not make very much difference, sister," answered Sophia, to whom at another time these would proved insurmountable difficulties in the way of hospitality. "I will help Susan with the clearstarching, and we can put off the workmen till Fifth Day morning."

"Well, if they must come to-morrow we had better invite some one to meet them," said Maria, when she had had her little grumble out; "supposing we ask the Darleys?"

There could be no objection to this addition, so a neat note was at once despatched to Jane and Joseph Darley, a young couple who had lately settled in Stokeland.

Not one word did Sophy say of the expected advent of Norman Smith, and she lay awake at night with serious doubts as to whether she was not committing an unprincipled action. Under the depressing

night influences her benevolent scheme dwindled to a folly in her thoughts, and she rose in the morning wishing the day well over, and feeling very much of a culprit.

But all this time we have left Norman standing at the door, and Sophia in mental agitation in the parlour. Fortunately, the servants happened not to hear him till he had knocked again, and this brief interval enabled Sophia to collect her senses. Her plan had been to introduce Norman casually in the evening, after seeing him alone and informing him that the Howes were staying to supper; contrary to his custom, he had come to tea, and there was not a chance of any explanation, for at this moment the Howes, the Darleys, and Eli and Maria were in the act of obeying her summons by crossing the hall.

"Why, Norman, thee have just come in time," she could hear Eli stuttering.

"I did not know that you had friends this evening. I ought not to intrude,"

answered Norman. And then there was a general greeting, and they all trooped in and took their places.

"Let me help make tea, Cousin Sophy," said Norman, when he had shaken hands with her, and taken the seat on her left.

He was looking unusually bright, and if he felt any embarrassment in Gulie's presence he did not show it. She was looking nervous and flushed, and could scarcely tell what Jane Darley was talking to her about. She had tried so hard to forget Norman, and now all in a moment, at the sound of his voice and the glimpse of his face, the old love was rushing through her heart in a resistless torrent. And he no longer cared! The way seemed, indeed, long and weary to Gulielma that evening, as she listened to Norman's pleasantries over the teacups. But she was not going to act the love-lorn maiden, so she plucked up a spirit and answered her neighbour brightly, talking more than was usual with her.

"When are the Carews going to appoint their new manager?" asked Eli, buttering little triangles of toast for general consumption.

"I believe they have decided on one," answered Norman.

"Ah, and who is that? Any one in the Bank?"

"Do not tempt me to betray secrets of state," said Norman with a laugh; "it was only decided this afternoon."

"I wish they had appointed some one I know," said Sophia.

"It is a snug post," said Norman, and he found himself looking at Gulielma.

How natural and charming she was, and how well her lavender cashmere became her; but, surely, she had grown thinner. The white lace fastened by the pearl brooch he had so often seen her wear, encircled such a small throat; her hands, too, used not to be so fragile, when in the happy dawn of their acquaintance he had held them at rare

moments in his and had not been forbidden.

After tea, some one proposed a walk in the garden, and from the garden they strayed into the field beyond, across which the setting sun was throwing long shadows. Sophia was talking to the Darleys, and Gulie and Alicia were walking one each side of Eli Bevington, who had promised to show them a bird's nest in the hedge at the side of the field.

Arrived at the spot where it was to be found, he pulled back the branches, and as he did so he called to Norman Smith, who was straying by himself at a few yards' distance. One by one they each peeped behind the leafy screen, and into the wonderful brown cradle where five nurslings, callow and ravenous, were opening their beaks appealingly, and craving the return of their father and mother from their hunting expedition.

Then the quartett went on down the field,

and without any clear idea of how it happened, Norman and Gulielma found themselves walking side by side.

"It seems a long time since I have seen you," said Norman.

"Yes," was Gulielma's laconic reply, and by dint of no mental exertion could she think of anything else to say.

"I came over on business to-day," he said, trying again, "but I did not know I should be so fortunate as to meet you here."

Still Gulielma could find no conversation for him; she had never felt so stupid in her life, and flushed with vexation.

"I am afraid I must have offended you," he said; "pray tell me if I have done anything amiss." He had forgotten all about the preaching. She was just the old Gulielma, only strangely silent and embarrassed. "Won't you speak to me?" he pleaded. "Have I offended you?"

"Oh, no," she said softly, looking up into his face with such love and trust in her eyes

that he could not misread their language, "you have never offended me."

"Gulielma," he broke out, "I have been obliged to be silent all this while; I may speak out now. I have always loved you—will you not try and care for me?"

She was so full of trembling happiness that she could hardly answer.

"Will you not try?" he urged again.

"There is no need to try," she said, smiling softly.

They were at the end of the field by this time, and the rest had turned back. He took her hands in his, and for a few brief moments they stood looking at one another, and that was their betrothal. As they walked slowly back he told her how poor he had been, but that now the vacant post in the Stokeland bank was his, and she told him something of her own fears and sorrow, and finally they sat down with the rest in the Bevingtons' best parlour, just under the shadow of the bookcase, with its grey freight

of departed worthies, and to those two all the world was glowing like a rose.

So Sophia Bevington's scheme succeeded according to her fondest anticipations, and the next morning Norman told her all about it, and begged her good offices with Gulielma's mother, but Sophia did not tell him that she had been his good fairy. There are some of us who when we give a cup of cold water by the way are unhappy unless we can prate of it, and descant on the shape of the cup and the quality of the water, but Sophia's life was so full of gentle deeds that she had no temptation to blazon forth one of them.

CHAPTER XIX.

FLORIBELLA.

THE studio of Mr. Fels, the celebrated sculptor, was unusually noisy one fine spring morning in 18—. An undersized young man, with twinkling black eyes, was seated on a table, and four or five other students were standing round him, shouting and laughing. The noise redoubled at the entrance of a large man in a blouse, who stopped short on his way to his own particular corner of the studio, astonished at his reception, and looking somewhat foolish.

He was older than the rest, and a head taller than most of them, and his marked features were framed in a long brown beard.

"Well, Jack, how is she?" cried one youth, with tears of laughter in his eyes.

"We've found you out at last, you old sinner!" shouted another.

"Oh, sweet Floribella!" cried the youth on the table, laying his hand on his heart, and looking upward in a mock rapture.

"I always knew he was a regular Lothario in disguise," said the first speaker, a sturdy young man, with his sleeves tucked up.

"Stop your nonsense," said the newcomer, "what a set of fools you are; what the deuce is it all about?" and he began arranging his tools.

There was a fresh shout of laughter, in the midst of which a young man of three or four-and-twenty entered the studio. He was clean-shaven, except that he wore a short moustache, and his well-set head was covered with crisp brown hair. His face was not strictly handsome as regarded feature, but the expression was remarkably clear and beautiful, and the eyes were deep and lustrous. His frame was powerful, and the strong hands lithe and delicately moulded.

"I say, Welsman," cried he on the table, "such fun—here's Hardwicke in love at last;

I saw him walking with her, with my own eyes"—

"Oh, I know all about it," said Clare, laughing; "I caught him in the fact, too; you had better set to work, for old Fels is close at hand. I'm desperately late this morning, and I was afraid he would get here first."

"I shouldn't have got here as early as I did," said the other, "but for seeing Hardwicke; under the circumstances I couldn't join him, so I modestly hurried round by the back way, and arrived here in double quick time with the welcome intelligence."

Jack Hardwicke was a man of decided opinions on most subjects. He was a Red Republican; he considered that the existence of a first cause was not conclusively proved; and in addition he was a determined woman hater. Was any youth belonging to Mr. Fels's studio smitten by the charms of some maiden of his acquaintance, he received scant mercy at the hands of the big sculptor, who

considered love the most pestilent of the delusions which mislead mankind. Hence the delight with which a seeming inconsistency on his part was discovered by his fellow-students.

What had really happened was as follows.

At a certain corner of the square, near which Mr. Fels's studio was situated, a little flower-girl was wont to stand with her basket of posies, and do a brisk trade in the flowery months. On this particular morning she had her basket filled with large primrose roots, which a lady living in the square had ordered, and Jack Hardwicke had overtaken her some quarter of a mile from her destination, toiling along with her heavy basket. She was a meagre, pallid little thing, scarcely more than a child—one who, had she been born in a higher grade, would have had the most nourishing food, the freshest air, the most careful tending. But she had been born in a garret, and her mother at times pawned her shoes for drink, and the best fare she had

ever tasted was the tea and bread-and-butter and cake at a flower-girls' meeting, to which some good soul had once invited her.

Just as Hardwicke came up with her, she had stopped in her walk, and leaned wearily against the wall, looking very white and faint. She happened to raise her eyes to Hardwicke's face with an unconscious mute appeal that quite unmanned him. The tears sprang to his eyes.

"Poor child," he said to himself, "to think that Florry might have been like this!"

Hardwicke was a baronet's son, and Florry was his sister, who had died at fifteen, amid the tenderest ministrations that wealth and love could give.

"Tired, little woman!" he said gently to the girl; "here, give me your basket, I am the biggest, eh? It's too heavy by half for you."

He swung her load up to his broad shoulder, and strode along the street till they reached the square, the girl trotting beside

him. Then he gave it into her little thin, soiled hands, and a shilling with it, and leaving her at the doorstep of her customer, he went down the street towards the studio, muttering to himself, "Poor little soul! poor little soul! and yet they go on saying there is a God!"

No one who was not as hard-worked, and young, and light-hearted as the students at Mr. Fels's, could imagine the amusement which this incident continued to afford them. The allusions to it were numerous, and the occasion of unfailing laughter, and one genius, more enterprising than the rest, furnished a series of outline sketches, entitled "Floribella's Courtship," the most successful being "Hardwicke asking the Consent of Floribella's Mamma," in which the latter lady was seated on a tub, and engaged in smoking a short pipe, while Hardwicke was arrayed in a hat and feathers and doublet.

Clare Welsman was now fairly launched

on his career, and was comfortably settled in a house in New Street. It was several years since he had been down to Stokeland, for an agent looked after the house; there had been no business that required his attention, and for pleasure he had no time or inclination, his whole powers being then bent on study. Of necessity he took some relaxation, but it was of such a nature as not to encroach on the regular day's work, and consisted of an evening at the theatre, an occasional concert, or a long stroll into the country. He was popular with his companions, and conscious that he made steady progress in his art, and though he worked hard, his life just then was singularly free from worry or strain. Altogether those were the happiest days he ever knew, and his whole nature expanded and brightened in them. His pulses beat with the equal rhythm of health, and his nights were long and calm. Perhaps there was not one of his associates to whom a brighter future promised, and

although he stood strangely alone, he was used to isolation, and was it not open to him to form the sweetest ties like another! Jack Hardwicke, who had eaten sour grapes in the past, and set his teeth on edge, looked with a kindly envy upon Welsman, and had taken a fancy to him, but the latter had stood aloof from forming any intimacy with the older man. In reality, though they never mentioned it to one another, as is the way with Englishmen, their closer friendship dated from the affair of poor "Floribella," which revealed Hardwicke to Clare in an entirely new light. He had previously looked upon him as a cynical and disappointed man, older by many years than himself, and roughened by the life of an Australian sheep farmer into an uncongenial companion.

When, soon after this, Clare bade adieu to Mr. Fels's studio, his friendship with Hardwicke grew instead of diminishing, and the men rarely passed a day without meeting somewhere. Hardwicke's liking for Clare

was half admiring, half patronizing, but he never failed to admit that the younger man was his master in their common art.

“I haven’t a spark of your genius, Welsman,” he once said, “but I am not a bad craftsman, and could decorate a house capitally; I like the manual work of the thing; I believe it was my organ of destructiveness made me take up with sculpting—I like to see the stone fly.”

CHAPTER XX.

A COMMISSION.

ABSORBED in his studies, caught away into the whirl of London life, Clare had for some time lost sight of his old Stokeland friends. Miss Alwyn had been busy with her new household, and was throwing her whole heart into its duties; Mrs. Howe was busy with a succession of little Smiths, whose chubby faces were appearing one after another with praiseworthy regularity in the winter months, and though she and Alicia sometimes talked of Clare and wondered what he was doing and how he would succeed, their paths never crossed each other. His only possession in Stokeland was the house which had been his home, and an agent had that under his care, so there was rarely any occasion for a visit from its owner, and the town was fast receding from his memory, when one day at a crowded

conversazione at the Kensington Museum he suddenly found himself face to face with the Harvards.

"Miss Alwyn!" he exclaimed, "how glad I am to meet you again."

"Then why have you forgotten me all this time?" she asked, smiling. "Perhaps, though, it is my fault; I ought to have looked you up."

"Indeed, I have not forgotten you," he said, eagerly; "but I have been so very busy."

"Worshipping your idols of wood and stone? Well, I want to hear all about them, and you. Allow me to introduce my husband."

"We shall be pleased to see you at Fulham," said Mr. Harvard, shaking hands with his wife's old *protégé*. "I have heard a great deal about your doings as a boy."

"Mrs. Harvard was very good to me," said Clare, a shadow from those past days crossing his face.

"When will you come down?" she asked; "to-morrow evening? We dine at seven,

and we shall be alone and can have a good chat."

Clare readily accepted, and it came to pass that he ran down on many to-morrows, and became a favoured visitor, who came and went as he liked, and found much refreshment in the Harvard household. Tossy and Flo were grown into fresh and charming girls, and the latter was writing a novel, retiring into secret hiding places to work out her plot, and blushing exceedingly if any one alluded to it. It became a favourite joke with Flossy and Clare to invent situations for her consideration, and the latter persisted in declaring that she had chosen him for her hero, and delighted in making sham love to her that, as he said, she might work out his character in its true light. They had so much fun, as well as so much wise and fascinating talk that winter, that Clare was disappointed and sorry when, one day in February, Mrs. Harvard announced that she expected a visitor, who would stay for three weeks.

“You do not ask who it is?” she said.

“Far be it from me to pry into your domestic secrets, my dear Mrs. Harvard,” answered he.

“Why it is an old friend of yours—you can’t have forgotten the Howes at Stoke-land? You used to think Alicia so pretty.”

“The Howes! of course not. Is it Alicia that is coming?”

“Yes. I expect her on Monday, and you must come down some day next week and renew her acquaintance; I am sure she would like to meet you again.”

“Why are you looking so pensive, Miss Flo?” asked he. “Surely you fear no rival near the throne of my affections? Know that I am true as {the needle to the pole—‘here Reginald threw himself on his knees before the lovely Arabella,’ etc., etc. That is the kind of thing to electrify the public, is it not, Mrs. Harvard? and then you should throw in any little compliment as to my personal appearance that might occur to you. I am

afraid you do not appreciate the advantages you enjoy in having such a model before you week after week."

"I appreciate you quite as much as you deserve," answered Flo, looking very pretty and saucy. "If you have any sense you will fall in love with Alicia Howe at once and for ever; she is the most delightful girl that ever was seen."

"I am all anxiety to view her charms," answered he. "Meantime let us have some music, may we, Mr. Harvard?"

"By all means," said the latter; "but if I go to sleep in the middle you must not be offended, or set me down as a Philistine. I have been down to Stokeland poring over accounts till I have come home quite dazed."

He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, and Mrs. Harvard, who was sitting by him, laid her hand on his arm which was nearest to her and let it rest there, with a look of satisfied love in her face. Clare was deeply impressed by the scene—"Will any one

ever look like that because I love her?" he wondered, as he turned Tossy's leaves for her while she sang Mozart's Addio. She had a sweet, rich contralto, and the wail of that exquisite melody went to his heart and saddened him unaccountably. He looked quite pale and tired when he said good-night, and as if he saw the shadow of a coming sorrow.

* * * * *

"Now, Welsman, here's just the chance for a promising young genius like you," said Jack Hardwicke the next morning, coming into Clare's rooms as the latter sat at breakfast, and throwing an open letter on the table.

"Has Government discovered my talents, or what is it?" asked Clare, helping himself to some more bread. "Won't you sit down and have some breakfast? I have eaten nearly everything on the table, but there is plenty of bacon downstairs, and they will get some fresh tea in a minute."

"My dear fellow, I never eat breakfast, thank you. I wish you would read that

letter. I shan't say anything to the others till you have had your innings."

Thus adjured, Clare took up the letter and read as follows :—

" Barham Towers,

" Jan. 28th, 18—

" MY DEAR JACK,—

" The townspeople have made up their minds to put up a statue of your great-uncle Richard in the space in front of the Town Hall, and yesterday a deputation consisting of the Mayor and two Aldermen came to consult with me about it, and take my opinion as to what sculptor should be employed to carry out the intention of the committee. Of course any of your leading men, such as Boehm or Woolner, or any of those expensive artists, are out of the question. Can you recommend any of your friends, and arrange for them to send in drawings or models? I would let you have the best portraits of Sir Richard, and the cast of his face

taken after death. If I had not been your father I should have recommended you, for we all think the bust of your mother admirable, but it would not do of course to make a family affair of it. Write as soon as you can make arrangements, for the committee is very anxious to set the thing on foot, and I want to oblige them in the matter as far as I can.

“Your affectionate father,

“THOMAS HARDWICKE.”

“What do you think of it? Will you undertake it?” asked Jack.

“I am afraid whether I could satisfy them,” said Clare, flushing to the very roots of his curly hair, with surprise and pleasure. “I might not manage to hit the likeness—committees are difficult to please.”

“Would you rather not have it?” said Hardwicke, looking blank.

“I should like to try,” said Clare.

“That’s all right, then,” answered Hard-

wicke. "The fact is I have replied to the letter already, and told my father I knew of an uncommonly clever fellow, and that the cast and pictures had better be sent at once."

"Thank you, Hardwicke," said Clare, gratefully. "I wonder you did not go to Scribner or Knowles—"

"Not if I know it, young man," answered Hardwicke. "Mind you do me credit. Unless you make a great mess of it the committee is pretty sure to accept my father's nominee. Queer old boy my uncle Dick was! He ran away with a pretty actress, and married her in the face of all the family—made a regular fool of himself about her. He actually went on the stage, too."

"Is that why Barham is erecting a statue to his memory?"

"Don't suppose the Barham people ever heard of it. That was ever so long before he came to the Towers. The pretty actress died, and then he married my sainted aunt,

who led him such a life of it at home, they say, that he took to philanthropy, and gave the town a good water supply instead of their old wells with the drainage soaking into them, and he had the quay lengthened, and put up a light on it. It never seems to have occurred to anybody to be particularly grateful while he was alive, but now that it can be of no sort of good to him they are going to put up this statue. The fact is, Simmons, the auctioneer, is mayor, and he wants to distinguish himself, so he has got the scheme up. They ought to put up one to my aunt, for she was at the bottom of it all, and if she had made him comfortable, and not been so confoundedly jealous, typhoid fever might be raging at this hour, and boats going to pieces on the Scarfe rock."

"Will your uncle make a good subject?"

"First-rate—he was very good-looking, as all our family are to this day. I must be off, and next time I come I shall bring the things," said Hardwicke. "Good luck to you,

old fellow," and he went out, slamming the door behind him.

Welsman rose, trembling with excitement, and began pacing his room, his young blood all aglow with the fire of hope and joy. In prosaic terms, all that had happened to him was that he had got his first commission, and scarcely that, for his design might not be approved, but to him Sir Thomas Hardwicke's letter came like a message from Heaven. He had never seen such sunshine as that which streamed into his studio that February morning. He could not keep indoors, so made his way down to the Embankment, up and down which a busy stream of wayfarers were passing to and from Westminster. There was a luminous mist hanging about the distant ships and houses, but at his feet the great river rolled along in the glory of the sunlight. The world seemed immeasurably large, and strong, and hopeful, and its life beat in time to the rhythm of his own happy pulses. In a poetic vision the beauty

of London was revealed to him as he never before had seen it; the stately palaces, pile on pile, skirting the river; the wealth of merchandise wafted into port by golden Peace; the ships themselves, rich in colour, and bearing messages from strange, dim lands across the seas; and he was aware, too, of the infinite spirit-battle waging there, and of the victors and the vanquished—but chiefly he thought of the victors that morning, and sin and suffering, and all dark deeds were swept away by the night to make room for the sunshine.

CHAPTER XXI.

AUT WIEDERSEHEN.

"Come, Disappointment, come !
Not in thy terrors clad ;
Come in thy meekest, saddest guise ;
Thy chastening rod but terrifies
The restless and the bad"—

repeated Tossy Harvard in a mournful tone of voice. They were employed in the old-fashioned game of "capping verses," and were seated in a circle round Mr. Harvard's wood fire in the library, a cosy room, with red curtains and carpet, and a carved oak mantelpiece and wainscot.

It was a cold Sunday, and there had been a snowstorm in the morning, which had left the outer world chill and white.

"Oh, Tossy, don't!" cried Alicia Howe, who was seated on the rug, leaning back against Mrs. Harvard's knees. "I am so tired of hearing people sing the praises of grief. Now I believe in happiness; if we

were all happy there need be no sickness or pain, for we should always be well."

"I believe," said Mr. Harvard, "that some doctors consider that unhappiness is punished by cancer, so there may be something in your argument."

"Don't you think it is good for people to be happy, Aunt Bessie?" asked Alicia.

"For some people," said Mrs. Harvard.

"I belong to that sort," said Alicia, gaily; "afflictions do not suit my constitution any more than winter does. I wish, Mr. Welsman, you would make us a statue of the god of happiness, and set it up in the garden; I will be high priestess and we will wreath it with flowers."

"It would be rather a chilly affair," said the matter-of-fact Tossy, "on such a day as this."

"Of course it would be in the summer, you silly child; the god himself would be miserable out of doors to-day."

"But he was the god of sorrow as well as of happiness," said Clare, "you forget that."

"I am not going to worship him in that capacity," said Alicia, "the world is too full of it already."

She was silent, looking thoughtfully at the fire as it flamed and cracked on the wide hearth. It was a wonderfully pleasant visit, this of hers, and soon it would be over. The Fulham circle satisfied her whole soul, and was a perpetual pleasure to her—and she was one who went hungry in most companies. Here there was not only goodness and kindness, but a keen artistic life, and a bright intelligence. Beside all this another charm had taken possession of her, summing up all the rest in its exquisite joy. Day by day, and hour by hour she was drinking in the knowledge that Clare Welsman loved her. Since that day when she had parted from him after Mrs. Welsman's death, circumstances had so fallen out that they had not met. In the intervening years he had grown from a boy into such a man as she would have singled out for her lover from all the world. He, on his side, was struck with amazement at the

change in her, and could scarcely realize that this radiant and dainty creature could be the slim school-girl he had known at Stokeland. Nourished on old acquaintance, on similarity of taste, on the need of love in each, there was rapidly growing up between them in the easy familiarity of these weeks at the Harvards' house, an unspoken love that perfumed the lives of each.

"Now then," said Flo, impatiently, "who is going on? b, a, d are the three letters," Clare began—

And I cry to myself, "If the wolf be Sin,
He shall not come in—he shall not come in;
But if the wolf be Hunger or Woe,
He will come to all men, whether or no!
For out in the twilight, stern and grim,
A destiny weaves man's life for him,
As a spider weaves his web for flies;
And three grim wolves, Sin, Hunger, and Woe,
A man must fight them whether or no,
Though oft in the struggle the fighter dies."

Alicia went on without pausing—

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand,
Who saith "A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half—trust God; see all, nor be afraid!"

"But your verse did not fit," said Tossy, "Mr. Welsman's last word was d, i, e, s, and you began with a g."

"I know," said Alicia, "but somehow I could not help repeating a bit of Rabbi Ben Ezra; it just seemed to come in, and I hoped nobody would notice it."

"When are you coming to see my studio, Mrs. Harvard?" asked Clare. "Could you come to-morrow?"

"Would you like it, Alicia?" said Mrs. Harvard.

"Very much," answered she, with drooping eyelids. She would gladly go anywhere to see Clare and hear him speak, and the thought of seeing his work was a delight to her.

As they went out the next morning she thought there had never been such rainbow-tinted waterdrops as those that hung on the Fulham shrubs, or such an exquisite winter world as that they passed through to reach the streets of London. He was waiting for

them, and his heart beat faster as he heard their carriage wheels at his door. Soon he must tell her that he loved her, but as yet he dared not; the time was near, but not yet fully ripe. What a charming picture she was in her black velvet and furs, with the gold circlet round her neck, and her small vivid face with its soul-lit look and delicate tints. He wished that he was a painter as well as a sculptor, that he might make a portrait of her just as she looked that morning. They first went up to the clay model upon which he was working—a child's head with a wreath of flowers in the loose hair.

"Are you going to send this to the Royal Academy?" asked Flo.

"Oh, no, this is a 'pot boiler,'" said Clare; "that bust at the other end, the old lady, is going."

"I am so glad you are beginning to sell your things," said the prudent Tossy, "it must be so disappointing to work and work and get no one to care."

"But there is always the pleasure of the work," said Alicia, earnestly, looking up at the sculptor.

He said nothing, but looked into her eyes, and the look was enough; how sweet it was to be understood, to understand!

"Why, Mr. Welsman, this is yourself!" cried Flo, who had strayed to the other end of the room by herself.

"I am gratified that you have made the discovery," said Clare.

"Why it is exactly like you," said Tossy.
"What are you going to do with it?"

"I do not know," said he.

"How sad it looks," said Alicia, with a troubled look; "why did you make it so sad?"

"I only tried to make it a good likeness; I did not feel at all melancholy while I was doing it."

"It is rather melancholy, Clare," said Mrs. Harvard, "but it is a beautiful bust.

Will you carve my plain face some day? My John insists on having it done."

"Not your *plain* face," said he, laughing, "I never saw it; I should be delighted to make a bust of *you*."

"Then in the autumn I will come and give you sittings, if you like; I have no time yet for it."

"When do you leave," asked Clare of Alicia; "is it really fixed for Wednesday?"

"Yes, I am obliged to go home on Wednesday," she answered.

"I am afraid I shall hardly see you again, then, before you go. I hope to run down to Stokeland in the summer to see about my house—may I come and call?" he asked.

"Of course we shall hope to see you," said Alicia; "mind you send us a line beforehand, in case of our being out."

"Now, girls," said Mrs. Harvard, "are you ready?"

"Not till they have had some lunch," said

Clare, leading the way into his sitting-room.

They all sat down, and began admiring the pretty table which he had provided for them; there was a vase of flowers in the middle, cold pheasants at one end, jelly at the other, and delicate pastry at intervals.

"What a capital provider you are," said Mrs. Harvard, taking off her gloves.

"Do you really think so?" he said, laughing; "I was dreadfully afraid of getting the wrong things, for I don't often have the chance of such visitors."

"You could not have done better if you had tried for a year," said Tossy, enthusiastically.

"What do you think Reginald would have procured if he had entertained the Lady Arabella?" asked Clare of Flo, as he helped her to some pheasant.

"How can you be so stupid?" she said, trying to frown.

The fresh air had given them good

appetites, and they were all very merry, and Clare's lunch was an undoubted success. When they rose to go, he was ready to wish that Alicia was even now his own, and that he could keep her sitting in his armchair when the rest left. But the time would not be long till summer, and then he would dare his fate.

"Good-bye," she said, going out, with a soft, shy look.

"Aut wiedersehen," he answered.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT BARHAM-ON-SEA.

CLARE did not go down to Stokeland that summer after all, for Mrs. Howe was taken ill with low fever in June, and when he sent a note to Alicia, proposing to come, he found that she and her mother were away at the seaside. On hearing this his zeal for seeing his house cooled down, and he concluded that it would be quite sufficient if he visited it in the autumn.

Of Alicia he was constantly thinking, whether he was looking at the chair in which she sat on that happy February morning, or whether he was building up his models, or busy with the effigy of Sir Richard Hardwicke. It was a full and happy spring and summer to him, and his powers were growing steadily and surely, like the unfolding of some fair flower.

Sir Richard Hardwicke's statue proved a great success, first in itself as a work of art, and, secondly, as a means of drawing visitors to Clare's studio. He had concentrated his whole energy on it ; the clay model had been accepted, as Hardwicke had prophesied, and by the end of the London season, what was but lately a shapeless block of marble, stood out clear and bold in the likeness of the dead nobleman whom Barham delighted to honour. Hardwicke spread the fame of the statue far and wide among his sisters-in law, and cousins, and friends who were in town, and actually made five morning calls with the sole object of talking about it; there could not have been a greater proof of his devotion to his friend's interests. The sisters-in-law, and cousins, and friends accordingly came, at Hardwicke's invitation, and some of them brought their friends, and they saw not only Sir Richard, whom the elders of them could recollect, but they saw also a tender fancy of the sculptor's, called Psyche, and a girl play-

ing at ball, and a terra cotta boy and puppy, and the bust of Clare himself, full of spirit and fire.

At first nothing much seemed to come of it all, and Hardwicke began to be cross and disappointed, and Clare rather impatient of the fruitless calls upon his time. But in the course of a few weeks, when there had been time to talk over the bright young sculptor and his doings, several things came of it. The wife of Hardwicke's eldest brother made up her mind that the Psyche was necessary to her complete satisfaction, and being unable to coax it out of her husband, by denying herself a new evening dress, and forestalling part of her next quarter's allowance of pin-money, she accomplished its purchase and bore it off one day in her carriage. Welsman, foolish fellow, instead of gloating over the handsome cheque, which the lady left on his table, could have sat down and cried like a girl at the loss of his dainty marble maid, and repented sorely that

he had offered her for sale ; he had thrown his very soul into the marble, and she had grown so dear to him ; besides, half unconsciously he had made her like Alicia Howe, and had learnt to look upon her as his tutelary goddess. He resolved that he would get some sittings from Alicia herself, and put her bust on the pedestal that Psyche had left vacant.

A day in the first week in October was fixed for the erection of Sir Richard's statue, and Hardwicke and Welsman saw to its safe conveyance to its station in Barham market-place, where it stood covered with a canvas veil, till the fulness of time had come for revealing it to the eyes of the public.

Clare stayed at the Towers, and enjoyed exploring the neighbourhood with Hardwicke, and learning to know his father and mother. That stately old couple lived a secluded life among their faded tapestries and oak wainscottings, rarely travelling farther than their coach horses could take them. Sir Thomas

was a Baronet of narrow income, and the Castle was a rambling pile of building with at least half its rooms uninhabited. All the brothers and sisters except two were married, and, as we know, Jack Hardwicke lived in London. Ermyntrude, the eldest sister, lived with her parents, and looked much older than her mother, having suffered for twenty years from asthma and disappointment. Her only comfort now was in scrupulously obeying the Rubric, and working stoles and altar-cloths for a High Church sisterhood.

The day appointed for the unveiling of the statue broke sunny and cloudless, and Barham was early astir. The town was decorated from end to end with flags, and the ships in the harbour showed their bunting. The sea ran crisply in, and the sky was blue as if it were July. The Corporation was to lunch at the Town Hall and entertain the party from the Castle and other distinguished visitors, and already Mr. Simmons, the

Mayor, was bustling in and out to see that all went well with the decorations. There was to be a flower show in Sir Thomas's park in the afternoon, and as all exhibits were to be on the ground by ten o'clock, there was great stir and preparation among the horticultural world of Barham. Carts and vans, and wheelbarrows were hurrying along the broad walk leading to the Castle. Young ladies might be seen embracing crystal vases, too precious to be entrusted to hired hands, and cottagers bearing trophies of wild flowers. It was a bright and wholesome scene, and Clare, who strolled into the tents after breakfast to pass the time, laughed to himself at the humours of it. He was very happy that day. He had done good work, and that work had met with acknowledgment; his world was kind to him, and full of faces that smiled approval on him. The day was so fair, and a day of triumph and well-earned success, and he was five-and-twenty with a long, fair future at

his feet. One has room for laughter on such a day. He found some unexpected work too, for one of the young ladies aforesaid, tremulous with excitement and anxiety, upset a jug of water over the clean tablecloth with which she had just covered her competition dining-table, and stood helplessly gazing at the disaster with tears of vexation in her eyes. It was not in Clare's nature to stand by at such a scene; in a moment he had helped her remove her soaking damask, dried her table, and hurried off to the Castle to beg another cloth. This arranged, he stumbled against an old countryman who had wandered in from a village near, without his list of exhibits, and was in vain appealing for assistance to the unheeding crowd, each member of which was bent on his own particular business. This was a difficulty beyond Clare's power to remedy, so he looked up one of the stewards, who speedily set the matter right, and deposited the old man and his vegetables in their fitting quarter. In

such a manner the hours passed rapidly till twelve o'clock, when the Municipal authorities were to meet, form in procession, and, accompanied by the town band and the chief inhabitants, were to march to the spot where the statue was standing. When the Castle party drove up, the procession stood grouped round the foot of the statue on a platform, and the band was playing melodiously. Mr. Simmons, in his red robe, with the mayoral chain round his neck, looked through his double eye-glass with pleased patronage at the crowd below, and felt that he was the mainspring of the whole proceedings. I am not sure that he did not take to himself part of the credit of modelling the statue, and it must be confessed that when it came before the council in committee in its original clay, he had suggested a striking improvement in Sir Richard's buttons which the artist had not failed to carry out. If Clare Welsman was happy that day, so certainly was Simmons, the auctioneer.

Silence fell on the crowd when the occupants of the platform were settled in their due order, and Mr. Simmons opened the business of the day with a speech over which he had spent long and delightful hours; then Sir Thomas Hardwicke, with a few cordial words, pulled the string which confined the shrouding canvas, and his ancestor stood revealed in the October sunshine. There was a deafening cheer: out it rang again and again, and then there were calls for the sculptor, and when Clare stood forward, agitated but radiant, and briefly acknowledged the plaudits of the crowd, there was the loudest cheering of all. Then the band struck up a joyous air, the procession re-formed, and under waving flags, with laughter and gay talk, they all made their way to the Town Hall where the luncheon was prepared, and there was more speech-making.

Jack Hardwicke was beaming with delight, and positively made poor Miss Ermytrude

laugh at the nonsense he talked as he steered her through the crowd on his strong arm.

"He seems a clever young man," she said, as they reached the Town Hall steps, and looking back, watched the people pouring down the street, "but I couldn't help wishing they had been cheering you. I believe you would have done it quite as well."

"Thank you, Truda," answered Jack, touched at this unusual speech from his cold sister, and squeezing her thin, withered hand. "He deserves the cheers; he has made a capital job of it. I am proud of my own discernment in picking him out."

"I vote that we run over to Paris for a week," said Hardwicke the next morning. "I am rather seedy after the affair of Uncle Dick, and you have not had a holiday yet."

"I am afraid I ought not to take one this side Christmas," said Clare, who had gained several commissions for busts from those visits to his studio.

"Nonsense—let Mr. Vernon and Lady

Blake wait a bit, they will think all the more of you ; besides, it will improve your mind—you can study the antiques in the Louvre every day if you like.”

“ I should like it immensely,” said Clare, who did not need much temptation to such a trip, and accordingly the plan was decided on without delay.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WHITE, MATCHLESS QUEEN OF THE WORLD."

"WHAT makes the charm of Paris?" asked Clare Welsman of Hardwicke as they sat under the trees in the Champs Elysée, and watched the pleasure-seekers hurrying by to the cafés chantants, and the concerts and circuses.

"Is it a conundrum or a line of poetry?" said Hardwicke, "or do you really inquire for information?"

"I mean simply what I say—what makes the charm of Paris? Is it the trees, or the fountains, or the sky, or the people, or the palaces, or the historic past, or all these together? I declare I do not know what it is that enchants me so, for all these things I have known elsewhere, both singly and combined, but never another Paris."

"Yes," said Hardwicke, "you are right ;

she is a queen among the cities, but a flighty one—a Cleopatra or a Venus. A whited sepulchre, I fear, to change the metaphor, full of the bones of men.”

“You are too hard upon her,” said Welsman. “Is London so immaculate? All great cities are bad—and good, and so is every village.”

“Paris has blinded you with her airs and graces,” said Hardwicke, and he hummed—

“I know a maiden fair to see;
Trust her not—she is fooling thee.”

“Not a bit of it,” said Clare. “I know she is a witch—I don’t trust her; but how surpassingly lovely! When I breathe this air I am a new man, and laugh at care. Do you think happiness an immorality, you old cynic? I am as happy as a child here, and as innocent, and if you are going to growl at me—and Paris—I’ll go over and see the fun at ‘L’Horloge’ opposite; look, they are lighting the lamps.”

“I daresay you will find an old fellow like

me rather slow company," said Hardwicke, lighting a cigar.

"Jack, don't be a fool," said Welsman; "you don't suppose I am really tired of you? I was never in that particular garden, but I have been in ever so many of the rest, and never could succeed in being amused."

"I am glad to hear it; perhaps you did not understand the songs?"

"Only too well; I soon had enough, and too much of them. I like this show, though. Look all down the avenue, how the glow-worms are lighting up among the branches. There are points of fire right up to the Arc de Triomphe."

And he fell a musing as to how Marie Antoinette would wonder at her city if she could once again gallop in from the Bois upon her sleigh with all her gay Lamballes and Polignacs.

All next day the two men strolled about, bent on amusement; along the streets with their tall white houses, looking like carved

ivory, down the Boulevard des Italiens, and along the Avenue de l'Opéra, and the Rue de Rivoli; past churches and palaces, and stately municipal buildings, and finally they arrived at the Palais Royal, and inspected the Vanity Fair compassed in its wide quadrangles. Into one of these Welsman insisted on entering to buy a little bracelet that was displayed in the window.

"You had better have the brooch, too," said Hardwicke, with a sneer. "The more you give them the better they like you."

"She is not like that," said Clare, not thinking what he said, but speaking to himself.

"Make much of her then, my dear boy; she is a rare one."

"I am too hungry to argue," said Clare; "let us get some lunch before I perish."

"I know a nice little place just by," said Hardwicke.

"Lead on then; I hope it is in this gallery?"

"It is the Café Dufour, on ahead; I know the waiters and the bulldog, and feel at home there, and the eggs and spinach are beyond praise."

It was an exquisite afternoon, and after a hearty déjeuner à la fourchette, they sauntered into the Tuileries Garden, and sat under the trees listening to one of the military bands which discourse martial music to the Parisians in the summer months.

The leaves were delicately green, and the sky a pale clear blue; the nurses with their streamers of broad bright ribbons hanging down their backs, and the lightly clad children flitted here and there; in the distance there was a feathery spray of fountains, and through it all the music rose and fell.

They sat silent, and stray melodies floated through Clare's brain. He was fairly intoxicated with the city's enchantment, and that evening, instead of going to bed, he sat by his open window, and looked out at the now almost deserted street, and listening to the

faint mingled sounds of night—snatches of
far-off song—solitary footfalls—voices and
laughter within doors—he wrote down his
scattered thoughts thus—

PARIS.

It is of Paris I sing,
White, matchless Queen of the World
With a people for king.

There is music under the trees,
And a pale blue autumn sky;
There is marble, ivory white,
And a gay crowd wandering by,
And air-blown bubbles rise and fall
As children toss them on high.

Fountains stainless and fair
Keep rhythm in the broad white square,
And on through a flowery way
Dance the hours of the golden day;
But on certain nights of the year
What phantoms gather here!

The square is a crimson flood,
And the fountains rain down blood;
For where Luxor's column stands
Of old the guillotine stood.

It is of Paris I sing,
White, matchless Queen of the World
With a people for king!

A babble of tuneful voices,
A flutter of garments gay,
A pleasant crowd that rejoices
In pleasant things of to-day;

Yet open the secret gate,
God ! what a passion of hate
And horror and wild despair
Spring from their hidden lair !

It is of Paris I sing,
White, matchless Queen of the World
With a people for king !

Who is this that is sitting
Between the Eagle's wings ?
Who is this that is sitting
Aloft in the place of kings ?
Broken are tyranny's chains
For the great Republic reigns.

She has risen, and cast in her anger
Sceptres and crowns aside,
And has robed about her beauty
A garment seamless and wide ;
She has rent the royal purple
Rotten with blood of the slain ;
And men are equal and free
And the winds breathe liberty.
And only they shall reign
Who are royal in heart and brain.

It is of Paris I sing,
White, matchless Queen of the World
With a people for king !

CHAPTER XXIV.

A CLUE.

“Do you know that I am a Parisian?” said Clare to his friend, as they drank their coffee at one of the little tables in the hall of the Hotel de Lille et d’Albion after the *table d’hôte*, when their week was nearly ended.

“How do you make that out?”

“I was born here according to my Aunt Welsman’s account, and somewhere in this street.”

“Do you recollect anything of the place?”

“Oh no; I don’t think my parents ever really lived here, and they both died before I could remember anything. My aunt is the only relation of mine I have ever seen; an odd thing, isn’t it? I have often wanted to know more about my parents, but she used always to shut me up when I asked questions of her, and I had no one else to ask.”

"Do you know which house you were born in?"

"I believe it is pulled down. I wonder whether I could hear anything of my mother by inquiring of some of the people."

"Hardly likely," answered Hardwicke. "It must be a long time since she lived here—let me see, how old are you?"

"I am twenty-five. I have a great mind to inquire though."

"Rather a wild goose chase, old boy. What do you say to going to see Phèdre? the eccentric Sarah is playing it to-night at the Comédie Française."

"What is the time?"

"Half-past seven and time we were off if we go," said Hardwicke.

They called a carriage, and on the way Walsman was silent and abstracted.

"I will certainly try and hunt up something to-morrow morning," he said as they alighted at the door of the theatre.

Unhappy, passionate Phèdre, with the

pathetic voice, wailed and declaimed her sorrows through scene after scene, till she sank at last under her burden of sins. The performance was a splendid piece of art, but its effect on Welsman was strangely depressing.

"A terrible story acted with terrible power," was his criticism as they walked back to their hotel, "how irrevocable a sin is, and how rank and fast its seed springs up."

"You are as gloomy as if you had been committing one," said Hardwicke laughing. "I expected you would have been raving about that little witch; what a figure the woman has—she's as thin as her own broomstick."

"Graceful though," said Clare.

"Ah, I have seen Rachel," answered Hardwicke, "and a very bad lot she was."

"Poor soul," said Welsman, "do you know her tomb in Père la Chaise? a gloomy little chapel in the Jews' quarter, with Hebrew over the gate; I hunted it out while you were at Fontainebleau the other day."

"How strange it is," said Hardwicke, "that the French make death so hideous in their cemeteries; they leave the national taste and judgment at the gates and are given up to tinsel wreaths and all that is repulsive."

"Not all," said Clare, "there are some touching simple graves in Père la Chaise. Nearly all the poor quarter is planted cheerfully and looks green and pretty; a widow the other day would take me to see her husband's grave; she had been putting it in order and it looked quite English except for the little image of the Sainte Vierge which she was careful to point out. On a tomb near it, a very small mound, some toys were laid, all broken and discoloured—I wished I had been a poet."

Some letters lay waiting for both the men on the hall table, and the porter, a bright little Frenchman with a gold band to his cap and twinkling black eyes, said to them—

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen, which of you is Mr. Welsman?" He spoke English

admirably though with the inevitable French pronunciation.

"I am," said Clare.

"There has one of the old chambermaids been inquiring for you—Marie Durand—she is married now and lives in the country, but she comes now and then to the hotel."

"But what does she want me for?"

"Ah, that I do not know; she saw your letters lying there and said the name was so familiar to her, and she would like to see you."

"There must be a fate in it," said Clare to Hardwicke, looking pale and troubled. "You may be sure I shall hear about my mother from her. Is she in the house now?" he inquired of the porter.

"Not now, sir, but she is coming again to-morrow about some linen; she is our—what do you call it—*blanchisseuse*—she comes here often."

No persuasions could induce Clare to leave the hotel on the following morning, so Hard-

wicke started off by himself to spend the day at Sèvres.

"If Madame Durand should come, send her to my room, 51, au deuxième," he told the porter after breakfast, and taking thither a copy of the "Petit Journal," he settled himself in an easy chair to await her arrival. He had skimmed the news and was half-way through the feuilleton by Henri Gréville, when there was a light tap at the door.

"Entrez," he cried, and immediately a neat Frenchwoman stood before him. He placed a chair for her, and she smilingly opened her business in voluble French.

She had noticed his name she said on the letters, the same name as *cette chère dame* who once lodged at her mother's house in the Faubourg; she had never heard the name since those days when she was a girl of twelve, and Madame Welsman was so good to her.

"Had Madame a baby? *Mais oui*, a little boy, a year old perhaps when she left Paris;

it was born at my mother's, and we all loved it.—Where was the house?—“ Ah, it was pulled down, it is ten years ago now, and there is a shop there where they sell curiosities, and my poor mother she is dead—she died while I was in service in this hotel, and soon after I was married to Jacques, who was a waiter here. Is Monsieur perhaps related to Madame Welsman? The name is not common among the English—at least those of the name do not come here; I am washerwoman, and I get to know visitors' names.—Was the husband of madame with her?—No, he was away, and sometimes poor madame would cry much.”

“ I think it probable that I am one of her family,” said Clare, “ relations of mine once lived in Paris. I suppose you have not a likeness of the lady ? ”

He shrank from telling her that this must be his mother—it was all so strange, and how could he confess that he knew so little of his parents' history ?

“Yes, my mother had one; a little painted likeness that Madame Welsman left with some rubbish to be burnt. My mother found it with some old ribbons and things, torn all across, and she pasted it upon a card. It is put away in my house, but I believe I can find it, if monsieur would like it; I will send it for him.—Oh, no, do not trouble to send it back. Monsieur is welcome to it.”

“And you never saw my—the lady’s husband?”

“*Jamais, jamais*, monsieur; and she only stayed with us about a year and a half.”

“Do you know where she went when she left Paris?”

“To England, I believe, but I do not know to what part; we never heard from her again. She was very good to us and gave my mother a present before she left, and bought some brooches for me and my sisters, and a cane for my father. Yes, she was very good to us all the while she stayed. What relation would monsieur be to her?”

"I must see her likeness first," said Clare, and then he thanked and dismissed the ex-chambermaid, and sat down to think. He strove, as he had often striven before, to recall some faint shadow of his parents, but all in vain. He could remember nothing but a little house and an old nurse, and scattered glimpses of his Aunt Welsman ; it was only when at seven years old or perhaps younger, he went to live with her at Stokeland, that his recollections grew clear and connected. No father or mother figured in one single reminiscence of his childhood, and his attempts to learn any particulars respecting them had always been so fruitless, that he had gradually ceased to ask his aunt any questions on the subject. He had given Madame Durand his address in England, as he and Hardwicke were to leave Paris early on the following morning, and the only thing he could do was to wait for the likeness which was the only trace left of the mother who was a stranger to him.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PORTRAIT.

A FEW days after he reached home a packet came to Welsman bearing the French post-mark. It was the promised likeness, and he opened it with eager haste. There was no letter inside, but only a message written in the envelope with Marie Durand's signature. The portrait was that of a strikingly handsome young woman, with thin features and black hair, and as he looked at it, there ran through him a shuddering sense of recognition. At first nothing was clear to him, except that the face seemed strangely familiar, though so unlike his own. Then there darted into his mind the thought that it was like his Aunt Welsman's, and yet there could be no relationship; it must have been his father and his uncle Welsman who were akin, be-

cause of the name. He gazed at it more and more intently, till at last he could see in it no face but his Aunt Welsman's. Feature answered to feature—there was even the dark ring of hair on the forehead, which was so familiar to him, and which he had noticed even when she lay dead. He was filled with stupid bewilderment, and sat turning the likeness about in his hands, in the vague hope of finding some sign. Then it struck him that perhaps after all there was some mistake, and this was not his mother's portrait, but one that Mrs. Welsman had given her; what would be more likely than that she should possess one?

For some reason, however, this explanation failed to satisfy him, and he felt instinctively that this was his mother's face, let it resemble whom it would.

A sense of mystery and discomfort hung over him, and he shrank from disclosing his difficulty to any one. One thing he was determined—that he would not rest till he

had solved it. He turned over one expedient after another for learning the real history of his birth, but each in turn seemed futile. His aunt was dead—his Uncle Welsman had died before he could remember anything, and he knew of no other relations in the world.

It was a forlorn hope, but was it possible that Mr. Thorpe, the banker at Stokeland, might know anything of the family story?

Clare caught at this straw, and all in a moment decided to go at once and ask him.

A train was in waiting when he reached the Stokeland platform at the Midland railway station, and a couple of hours more found him, with the portrait in his pocket, seated in the bank parlour, awaiting the return of Mr. Thorpe from lunch.

By the time that the banker's sleek bays drew up at the door, Clare was in a state of nervous anxiety that he could not have explained, but that made it almost impossible to him to tell his short story calmly and intelligibly.

Mr. Thorpe received him courteously and pleasantly.

"You never look us up at Stokeland, now, Mr. Welsman," he said, seating himself at his writing table. "I do not think we have met for three or four years—only once since I turned you off, and you started on your own responsibility."

"I have not forgotten how kind you were to me, though," said Clare, "and I have come to ask a favour of you"—

He paused, and the banker looked keenly at him.

"There is nothing wrong, I hope," he said, seeing how pale, Clare was.

"No, not exactly," said Clare, "but I wished to ask you whether Mrs. Welsman, my aunt, ever told you anything of my parents?"

"She never did," answered the banker, with another peculiar glance at the young man.

"And you—it is hardly likely—you do not

know anything about my mother? I am told that this is a likeness of her, but my aunt always let me know so little of my parents that I cannot tell."

Mr. Thorpe silently took the portrait, and sat looking at it, as if afraid to meet Clare's anxious eyes.

"You do know something!" cried the latter at last. "I entreat you to tell me what you know!"

"Mr. Welsman," said the banker, "while I acted as your — as Mrs. Welsman's — executor, had you any reason to distrust me? were you satisfied with my judgment and my advice in your affairs?"

"I was always satisfied," answered Clare. "I have trusted in no one more than yourself."

"Then trust me once more, and do not ask me any question on this subject. Let the past be past, and do not try to revive it; it is for your good that I say this. I am firmly persuaded in my own mind that it will

neither make you a better or a happier man to hear the tale of bygone troubles. Your aunt was wise to keep them from you, and you will be wise to leave things as they are."

"Mr. Thorpe, after what you have said, I must know—I know how kindly you mean, but I must know. Tell me all, and do not spare me one fact. I will bear anything to know the truth, but I cannot bear to be kept any longer in the dark."

He was white to the lips, but his face was set like a flint.

Still the banker was silent, not knowing now to tell the tragic story.

"Is that my mother?" persisted Clare, pointing to the faded, torn likeness upon which his fate was turning.

"It is," said Mr. Thorpe.

"You have seen her then?"

"I have seen her."

"And who, and what was she?"

"Welsman," said the banker, "once more I warn you to let the past rest; it is for no

good that you seek to disturb these graves. For your mother's sake, trust me, and be silent."

Clare scarcely heard him.

"Who and what was she?" he said again.

"Mrs. Welsman, your aunt, was your mother, and you were not her husband's child."

"My father's name?" he asked, in a low voice.

Again the banker paused.

"I have a right to know," said Clare.

"Your father's name was Mowbray, and he is dead."

"Thank you," said Clare quietly, "you have done quite right to tell me."

"Are you going back to London?" asked the banker, wondering at his composure, and relieved that he inquired no further.

"Yes, by the next train," he answered in a mechanical voice; "I am very busy just now. Good-bye."

In another moment he was gone. He

passed along the old familiar streets like a man in a dream. He was as one who has suddenly fallen down a precipice, and lies stunned and stupid, but will ere long awake bruised, crushed, fatally maimed it may be. The only definite image before his mind was that of Captain Mowbray clinging to Miss Alwyn's railings, and looking at him.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE STORM.

It was evening and a fierce wind was raging. It caught the late flowers and wrestled with them, and bruised their blossoms. The ground was strewn with leaves and upturned fragments of plants. The tall chrysanthemums swayed and bent in the hurricane, and the geraniums were pitilessly battered, and here and there lay prostrate and forlorn. Out at sea too the storm was busy, and masts were snapped and fishing boats went down, and the sky was black and pitiless.

Clare Welsman sat in his studio alone. He was now waking from the stupor that had fallen upon him, and wondering that he had before had no glimpses of the truth. Now it stood out link by link in horrible distinctness and crushed the life out of his soul. He who had hated vice as few men hate it, was vice's

offspring—a blot on creation—a shame and a living sin, disowned even of her who bore him. The cold white statues stood staring at him with blank eyes, and seemed his own no longer. The wind shook the doors and windows, and swept by with a roar. In the room there was a moaning and whistling, and a distempered imagination took possession of him. He could hear a hissing whisper through the storm as if those marble lips mocked him and called him *bastard*.

A horrible dread fell upon him. What if even now already the curse was working, and he was going mad as his father and father's father—how well he recollected the hideous story—had done before him? He hid his face in his hands and sank on the floor in an agony. He could not pray in words, but his whole being was a cry for help to the Almighty who in the dark and silence holds the key of mysteries.

Night deepened round him and the chill spectators of his anguish gleamed a shadowy

ghostly circle till midnight blotted out their shapes. He neither stirred nor looked up, but towards morning the storm lulled and a sleep fell upon him.

When he awoke, cold and stiff and shattered in soul and body, fugitive gleams of sunshine were flitting across the floor, for the wind was chasing away the rain-clouds that still lingered. He moved about as a man who has said farewell to happiness, and presently wandered aimlessly into the street and down towards the river. A dull longing for nepenthe was upon him as he gazed at the tide rushing in—what if he wore away the day and at night crept down those steps and in a moment ended all—

The suggestion began to take definite shape; he planned the hour and the way best to compass his end, and then walked on along the Embankment. The autumn leaves swept across the pavement, and the sky was still dull and grey. Two girls were coming towards him, wrapt in velvets and furs like

Alicia, and talking gaily. They glanced at him, and at sight of his face stopped laughing and he heard one say to the other—

“He must be ill—poor fellow!”

The kindly human tone recalled him to himself, and he hurled back the temptation that had seized him as the gale last night had seized many a ship, straining every rope and trying every timber. Well for him that he met the enemy with a will unsapped by self-indulgence and with a heart unstained by sin. It had not been Clare Welsman's way to palter with the devil, so he grappled with him now and threw him. For the first and last time the spectre of suicide had haunted him. But he was very wretched and craved unspeakably for help. To whom could he turn? He could not tell Hardwicke—at least not yet: nor the Harvards. The thought of carrying his miserable story into that calm haven of peace at Fulham sickened him. The glory of his life was gone. That appalling law that has made sin reflective and irrecover-

able had smitten him. He could be no lover for Alicia Howe for at any hour the stroke of doom might fall. His heart failed him at the life that he must lead; cut off from his kind in hope and love; a solitary man with a tainted name and lineage.

When he got back to the house, a maid met him in the passage with—

“Please sir, I was to tell you that there is a lady in the parlour that has been waiting for you ever so long. And when will you please to have breakfast? the things is laid.”

“Oh! I don’t want any breakfast,” said Clare, hurrying by her into the parlour.

Mrs. Harvard rose from the sofa with outstretched hand.

“Why what fashionable hours you keep,” she cried, “eleven o’clock and you have not breakfasted! I came up from Fulham with John, he had some business in the City—but you are not well?” she said still holding his hand, “my dear Clare what is it?”

“It is ruin,” he said with white lips.

She sat down and made him sit by her, and stroked his hand as she might have done when he was a boy at Stokeland, on one of those happy afternoons in her drawing-room with the tools and models about.

The floodgates of his grief were suddenly loosed and he sank on his knees by her, and burying his face in her lap he wept convulsively.

“Oh, mother!” he sobbed, “mother! mother!” It was not on the woman who had disowned him that he was crying, but on some ideal, longed-for woman such as Mrs. Harvard, whose love might have blessed him. And by degrees he told her his story, and she wept over him as if she had been his very mother and soothed him and bade him take heart, and forced meat and drink upon him, and stayed with him till the day was well on.

“You shall come back with me now to Fulham,” she said when she found that she must leave him.

“Not to-day,” he said, “I cannot.”

"Then to-morrow? you will come to-morrow?"

"Thank you, I shall be glad to come if you will have me. I wonder you are not afraid," he added bitterly, "I ought to be labelled Dangerous."

"Clare," cried Mrs. Harvard, laying her hand on his arm, "promise me that you will live this down. I know how hard it is—it breaks my heart to think of it, but your part is to live it down. You were never a coward and though the odds are terrible you must not be found wanting. If only we could have saved you this! but now you will be strong and bear it like yourself; we all love you and you must not fail us."

She went to Hardwicke's lodgings as she returned, and told him that Welsman was not well, and asked him to call in New Street, without making mention of her request, and then travelled down to Fulham with a heavy heart. Mr. Harvard had come home some hours earlier, and sat in the study by a

blazing fire, reading his favourite Greek plays. His wife came in, and he looked up at her as he turned over the leaves of the lexicon in search of a difficult verb.

"I thought you had run away, little woman," he said, "how late you are. Did you have a sitting?"

Mrs. Harvard's object in visiting the studio that morning had been to arrange about the bust of herself.

"Oh, John, John," she cried, "what is the good of reading Eschylus? Put him away; there are English tragedies enough, without the Greek, and Fate is more cruel than ever."

Hardwicke lost no time in making his way to Clare's lodgings. He was sure from Mrs. Harvard's call, and from her manner that something unusual had happened to his friend, and as he strode along the streets he revolved in his mind what misfortune could have befallen. When he questioned Mrs. Harvard she had answered vaguely, and

hastened away as soon as she obtained his promise that he would go to New Street.

He was not long left in doubt when he was once in Clare's presence. Without delay, in a few bitter words, he told him what he had learnt of his own history. He was deadly pale, and started at the least unexpected sound, and had not roused himself to make a fresh toilette, wearing the same clothes still in which he had travelled to Stokeland. There was a look of hopeless suffering in his face that scared Hardwicke; he was like some bright creature overtaken by a storm, with its brilliance all dimmed and plumage marred.

"Of course, I shall keep the story to myself," he said, after a pause, "there is no need for the world in general to know of it; but I felt bound in honour to tell you, because"—he broke off and sat covering his face with his hand.

"Because you thought it would make a difference to me," cried Hardwicke. "What

made you think me such a damned scoundrel ? The fact is, I have guessed something of the sort for a long while—ever since you told me once that you could learn nothing of your parents. Don't you recollect I discouraged you in Paris when you wanted to make inquiries ?”

“ Then there are two people that stand by me,” said Clare, looking up.

“ I tell you what it is, old fellow,” Hardwicke went on, “ you must not give way like this; it is a hard knock-down blow for you, but you must not let yourself be conquered. Fight it, and make up your mind you won't be beaten. Now I am going down home by the evening train that starts at eight; make yourself decent and come with me. I shall not take a no, and we'll get a few days' shooting. There is just three-quarters of an hour before we start, so go and pack up, and we'll talk it all over afterwards.”

This rough-and-ready mode of treatment

was, perhaps, the best that could have been devised for Clare's present state. He obeyed Hardwicke like a child, and the necessity for action helped him to shake off the heavy depression that was settling over him. Besides it was some comfort that Hardwicke had guessed his parentage, but had not shunned him, for in his morbid humour he was beginning to imagine himself a social pariah upon whom all the world would look askance.

CHAPTER XXVII.

CLARE WELSMAN'S MOTHER.

SOME twenty years before the commencement of my story, there was a wedding at the parish church of Stokeland. The bride was Mr. Handsworth the lawyer's handsome daughter, then twenty, and the bridegroom was Mr. Welsman, of the Indian Civil Service, who had buried his first wife and come to England to look for another. At an evening party in London he had met Millicent Handsworth, with her black brows and aquiline features, and had fixed upon her as an article likely to do him credit and shine in Anglo-Indian society. Mr. Handsworth was poor, and could give no dowry with his daughter, so in spite of the thirty years' difference between the pair, he favoured Mr. Welsman's suit, and his daughter had no especial objection to urge against her

admirer. A pair of diamond earrings finally concluded the bargain, and in a month's time Millicent had become Mrs. Welsman, and sailed for Calcutta.

All went well for a time, and the bride was welcomed and fêted to her heart's content. It was a new life to the country attorney's daughter, who had made her own dresses, and whose jewellery had consisted of two gold brooches and a bracelet. Mr. Welsman was proud of her beauty, and showered presents upon her; her toilette was rich and varied, and she had the finest diamonds of any lady in her set. Her head was fairly turned, and excitement became her meat and drink; but it was two years before the world began to talk disapprovingly of her, and just then Millicent Welsman was a better woman than she had ever been before. There was a new growth of tenderness within her—a new possibility of self-sacrifice and nobleness such as she had never known in her thoughtless girlhood, or in the

mercenary hardness of her married life. All astray and distorted as the love springing up within her was, it ennobled her. She grew more careful for others, wiser, and deeper in feeling, and lovelier in face. There was no danger, she thought, only life had suddenly grown a sweeter thing than she could have imagined. At first she scarcely realized what made it so; then she found that one face glorified ball and picnic, and riding party, and that without it all these diversions were laborious and empty.

The third year of her marriage passed away thus, and at last wherever Mrs. Welsman was, Captain Mowbray followed. There was a good deal of talk about it, and the friends of both extracted great enjoyment from the scandal during the languors of the rainy season, and some whispers reached Mrs. Welsman's ears, and made her furious and miserable. It was so hard that this delight should be a sin; she determined to be happy come what might. Let them

talk; she had done no harm, she thought, holding her proud head the higher when she saw that she was watched.

Captain Mowbray was pleased with his conquest, and the gossip was flattering to his vanity. Of the depth of the flattered beauty's feeling he had no conception. There was within himself nothing to make him able to comprehend it. Good-looking and well-bred, a favourite with women, and with good prospects of promotion, he found Indian life remarkably pleasant, and was not disposed to deny himself any amusement that might happen to fall in his way. At present the most piquant amusement was the pursuit of old Welsman's pretty wife, and he could see nothing likely to come of it but enjoyment and credit to himself.

Mr. Welsman, absorbed in the duties of his office, and caring little for his wife's gaieties, was the last to hear the rumours affecting her good name, but when he did hear them he was very uneasy, and resolved

to watch her narrowly. He soon saw enough to convince him that there was some understanding between her and Captain Mowbray, and he resolved on immediate action.

"I suppose you are not going to the Vernons' ball to-night?" she inquired, on the morning of a sultry day, on coming in from her early ride.

"No," answered Mr. Welsman, "and I hope that you will not go."

"And pray, why not?" she asked haughtily, with an inward tremor and presentiment of evil.

"It is my especial wish," he answered. "I think it well that you should keep quiet just now."

She swept from the room, and for the rest of the day he saw no more of her. Between nine and ten in the evening she appeared in the drawing-room, splendidly dressed, as he had once well liked to see her, and glittering with his diamonds.

"Do you intend to defy me?" he asked, rising angrily.

"I do not understand you," she said, arranging her necklace with a negligent air. "I am not a child, and I will not endure tyranny. Why should I stop at home? Every one is going to the Vernons'."

"Because you have become town talk," he said, convinced more and more by the cold defiance of her altered manner that his suspicions were too just. "Because I will not have my wife the jest of every man that sees her conduct."

"What have they against me?" she cried, "the cowards! and my husband to believe them!"

"Millicent," answered Mr. Welsman, "stay at home to-night, and tell me that their tales are lies, and I will believe every word you say."

She knew that she was choosing between her husband and her lover, and for a moment she paused—then,

"I cannot stay at home," she said, "you have no right to ask it."

"A husband has the right; listen to me

once-for all, Millicent; if you go out to-night it is for the last time; I will never see your face again."

With a fierce gesture she tore the diamonds from her neck and arms, and flung them on the table, and then, gathering her crimson cloak round her, she went out into the night a lost woman.

Within a month she had sailed for Europe in company with Captain Mowbray.

For the first year her life was a mixture of passionate happiness and remorse, and they wandered from one lovely foreign town to another. Chiefly to such places as tainted reputations most affect—Florence, Homburg, the Riviera, and finally to Paris. They had ample means for such a mode of existence, for Mrs. Welsman's marriage settlement had been a handsome one, and Captain Mowbray had private means.

The end was sharp and sudden. One day she thought his manner strange and his talk incoherent, and for the first time she recol-

lected, with a shock of fear, a speech she had heard at a picnic years before.

Some one had spoken of Captain Mowbray—he was nothing to her then, and she had paid no heed at the time—and a young civilian newly come from England had said—

“Mowbray? Is he one of the mad Mowbrays of Crossthwaite Hall?”

He was one of the mad Mowbrays, and before that week was out he had threatened her life, and was in confinement. His relatives were summoned; he was taken to England, and Millicent Welsman was on the world alone. She dared not venture back to England yet, so she took the Durands' rooms, and there, a few months later, her child was born. Then she began to weary of a foreign life, and longed for home, poor forlorn soul.

Her father had died suddenly in the first year of her married life, and was spared the knowledge of her shame. There was no home for her in India. What if she went to London and hid for a while in that wilderness?

As soon as the child was old enough, she crossed the Channel, placed him with a nurse in a suburban village, and settled in furnished lodgings.

She had not lived in London many months before she saw the announcement of her husband's death, in the *Times* one morning. She had not loved him ; she had used him ill ; both reasons for her feeling a sense of relief at the knowledge that he could not trouble her. But mingled with that relief came a paroxysm of late remorse. He had been a good, and trusting, and generous husband to her, and she had betrayed him with open eyes.

Since then she had suffered bitterly ; her lover was irrevocably lost ; her character was tarnished, and she was burdened with the child which she half loved and half hated ; but all this she felt could not atone. She resolved that she would offer up the rest of her days as a sacrifice ; that she would live to make what restitution was possible for herself and for the boy.

Acting upon this resolution, she deliberately attached herself to the congregation of a well-known preacher, and began that course of self-denying labour which she carried on at Stokeland. One thing, however, she could not do—she could not front the world and call the child her son. In her contrition and morbid self-scourging, it sometimes came before her whether she must not openly avow her shame to make the sacrifice complete; whether her good works were not null and invalid while she hid her past, and mixed with her new associates as an honourable woman. But she had no strength for that humiliation, and she kept the boy in hiding all the while she lived in London.

Her father had died almost penniless, and the only legacy he could leave her was a small house in Stokeland. To this she came after five years of London life, in spite of the chance that her story might have travelled to her old home. At first she dreaded the thought of reappearing in the familiar scenes

of her childhood, but she reflected that it was so many years since she had gone away that she was doubtless half forgotten ; that a new generation must be rising up, who would not concern themselves about her past ; that outside the Calcutta world few had been aware of her story ; so, having yearnings for her old home, and being weary of the hurrying crowds and the heat of London, she risked the chance of discovery. To that Stokeland house she brought Clare Welsman later on, a forlorn-looking boy of seven, passing as her nephew.

She had not meant to lie about him, but some one had given him that name in good faith, and so she gladly availed herself of it instead of calling him her adopted child, as she had intended. She was still often driven to confess him hers, and complete her expiation ; but the flesh was weak, and she dared not.

All else she was willing to do, so intent was she, now that she had lost earth, on

winning heaven. Had hair shirts and iron crosses been still the Church's weapons, she would have fretted her meagre body with them ; but lacking these she found her mortifications in unclean Sunday scholars and chilling winds and rains, and the unceasing visitation of evil-smelling cottages, and in cutting herself off from every pleasure, even from loving her child very much. Was it right that she should make an idol of him, and reward herself for her sin? She was kind to him at all times, but sternly repressed any tenderness within her, more especially because he looked at her sometimes with his father's face. All the force of her nature was concentrated on winning heaven. Her sins were pardoned—of that she was assured, and she would not risk salvation for any earthly lure.

There was only one person in Stokeland who had heard her story, Mr. Thorpe, the banker, and when she went to him to beg him to act as her executor, and Clare's guardian

if necessary, she felt that he knew it, and craved courage to ask him to keep it secret. She wondered, too, how he had learnt it, not knowing that he had a half-brother in Calcutta. She need not have feared Mr. Thorpe. He knew many people's secrets, and knew how to be silent, and hers never passed his lips till Clare forced it from him.

So, as we have seen, Mrs. Welsman was kindly received in Stokeland, and people were content to know that she was a widow, had lived abroad many years, and that she was bringing up her nephew.

By a curious fatality Captain Mowbray was removed to the county asylum at about the time of her coming to Stokeland, his insanity having shown no signs of abatement. Of this she was entirely ignorant till the evening of his appearance outside Miss Alwyn's window.

The chief horror of her life was the fear that the child was tainted with his father's madness; that bitter penalty of her sin daily.

hourly, haunted her, and compelled her to watch his every look and movement with an intense anxiety that helped to wear away her life. And with it all, she dared not love him as she could have loved, and she died before he had ever called her Mother.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE OLD HOUSE.

ON his return to London, Clare Welsman settled down into the old routine with dogged resolution. There were hours when the dread of that dark future that might be his almost unmanned him; hours when the temptation to see Alicia and snatch delight in her love was well nigh irresistible. He had neither turned misanthrope nor blasphemer, nor self-destroyer—in so far it was well with him; but the glory of his life was gone, and he worked on with a heavy heart at variance with his five-and-twenty years.

It was in November that he had a letter from his Stokeland agent, strongly urging him to come down and give orders for the repair of his house which had stood for some time untenanted.

He resolved to go down that day, and trust

to chance whether he saw Alicia once more or no; he would float with the stream, and would not throw himself in her way; but it would be sweet to meet her, and look his last—that could not be a sin.

It was a fair day for the season of the year: one of those sunny days that break from a hazy morning sometimes in late autumn. He trod the old familiar way to Anchor Street in a state of strange elation, for some instinct within assured him that he should meet Alicia, and as he turned the corner of the street he saw her coming. He was alone, for the agent had gone out, not expecting him so soon, and he waited for her.

With a radiant face and throbbing heart she came on towards him along the sunny pavement. How often she had longed to see him as she saw him now! That morning of all mornings she had been thinking of him, and wondering when some golden day would bring him to her.

“You have come at last!” she cried,

putting out her little gloved hand, and looking at him with a world of love and trust in her glowing face.

Then, when he said nothing, she drew back a little, and said more formally—

“We were so sorry that we were not at home when you wrote; can you call to-day?”

“Thank you, I am afraid that I shall scarcely have time,” he said. “I have just run down to see about the repairs of this place, and I must go back when that is done.”

How dared he trust himself in her sweet society? he had not strength sufficient for it.

Chilled, and suffering keen disappointment and pain, Alicia walked on with him till they reached the house, and he took the key from his pocket and thrust it in the lock.

“Oh, he does not care, he does not care! it is all a cruel delusion; oh, how wretched I am!” poor Alicia was crying dumbly, “how I wish I had never seen him!”

"Good-bye," she said, turning away.

"Will you not come in and see the house?" he asked her. It seemed to him that something spoke through him, and that he could not help saying the words. "Let me have your opinion about it."

"If you like," she answered, and she followed him from room to room in a dull maze, replying to him, and talking she knew not what.

"Poor old Mary!" said Clare, when they reached the kitchen, "how many hours I spent here with her, and how good she was to me. I can fancy her now singing the Old Hundredth, with her cat on her lap."

It was the pleasantest room in the house to Clare, for it was the least associated with his mother; and yet as he went from one of her haunts to another, a great pity for her swelled his heart. "I wish I had loved her more," he thought, "poor mother!"

They passed through the house and went out into the garden behind it. How altered,

how deserted the long strip of ground looked. In Mrs. Welsman's time it had been carefully and methodically tended, and though the flower-beds were few and formal, they had been scrupulously neat, and free of weeds. Now they were a wild mass of dandelions and sowthistles, and other lawless growths. The plot of grass that stretched down the middle of the garden had not been mown for many months, and bore a rank, straggling crop of irregular vegetation. The two passed silently down the gravel walk to the summer-house, and paused there by common consent. The paint had dropped away from the wood-work in many places. The door was swelled with damp, and the lock rusty, and it would not yield to Welsman's efforts to force an entrance.

"I used to play here as a boy," he said to Alicia; "I must get in and see it once more; would you wait one moment while I fetch a chisel? The people next door will be sure to have one."

"Oh, yes, I will wait," said Alicia, "I can sit here till you come back," and she placed herself on a low wooden bench that stood near the summerhouse.

"If I could but do something for him!" the poor girl thought as she watched him stride quickly back to the house; "if I could die for him!" Her grief seemed more than she could bear. The dreary garden too smote upon her heart, and brought the tears to her eyes. "Why was I born?" she thought, "life is too difficult and hard."

She tried to keep back her tears, but she was nervous and not mistress of herself that morning, and they streamed down her cheeks in spite of her. She wiped them away, and when she saw Welsman reappear at the other end of the garden she struggled hard for composure, and by a violent effort recovered herself and tried to smile. It was all to no purpose however. Her nerves were so unstrung and her sensibilities so highly wrought that at the first sound of his voice she broke

down again, and sat there helplessly sobbing in the bright sunshine.

A fit of desperation seized Welsman at the sight, and his head whirled till he staggered. He laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Alicia," he murmured, "my darling, what ails you?"

But he knew too well.

He left her and went to the door, driving his chisel into the opening; one or two vigorous wrenches, and it flew open.

"Alicia, come in," he said, "I have something to tell you."

She rose slowly, and trembling, went in to him. There was the summerhouse just as he had left it; the seats in the same order, the old well-known table there still. He placed her on a bench, and sat down beside her in the very place where "Apollo" once had stood.

"I thought I would not tell you, but I find I must," he began. "Alicia, I am most unhappy. I am tied hand and foot, and all

that is dearest to me is beyond my reach. I love you—you know I love you—but there is no hope for me—not one gleam. We must try to forget each other, that is all. Oh, it is hard, too hard!" He leaned his head upon his hands, and she drew nearer to him, all her tears dried up suddenly. She laid her soft hand on the bowed head and stroked the hair tenderly.

"Tell me why," she whispered, "I will bear it."

Her love for him stood all confessed in those few words; but what matter? He should know that she loved him, come what might.

"I never knew it till this year. It may be that you will shrink from me when you hear what I must say. Oh, my God!" he cried in an agony.

"Is it some crime?" she asked, "something you have done? It never could alter me—never—never—only tell me."

Still he dared not speak.

"Have mercy on me!" she pleaded, "I

cannot bear suspense—only let me know the worst ! ”

He uncovered his face, and looking out into the desolate garden he said, in a low measured voice—

“There is a taint upon me; but not through any fault of mine—my father and my father’s father went mad—so may I. No son of mine must be a madman, and I must not ruin any woman’s life—yours least of all, for I love you better than my own soul.”

For a moment she was still under the shock, then she said—

“My poor darling ! oh, my poor darling ! ” and instead of shrinking from him she crept still closer to his side. He felt her shoulder touch his arm, and her breath was warm on his cheek.

“We must be brave,” he said, choking down his anguish, “we shall meet hereafter, or there could be no heaven for me ! ”

“Ah, it is so long to wait ! it is so vague, the hereafter ! ” moaned Alicia.

A wild uncontrollable longing seized Clare ; it flashed into his heart like an inspiration, and carried all before its force.

“Alicia !” he cried, looking for the first time in her face, “it is long, it is vague ; be mine now—for one hour—we must part then—but let us put it by for one hour. Come, we are betrothed, love, you are mine, and no one shall part us—lay your head here !”

He put his arm round her and laid her head on his breast, and leaned his face against it.

It was an hour snatched from fate ; one bitter, short, sweet hour, yet an eternity. They spoke such words as those speak who face death. Words heavy with the passion of years, with the double tragedy of their lives. Yet hidden even in the heart of that grief there was a fire of happiness such as only love and duty know.

A sound broke through the stillness. It was the great church clock striking the hour of noon. With one consent they rose and

went out of the summerhouse, and back through the deserted garden. A robin hopped from twig to twig, wailing plaintively, and all her life long Alicia could never hear the sound without living over that strange walk.

When she reached the hall door she turned and they kissed one another.

"No death can part us," she whispered. In a moment more she was gone, never to see Clare Welsman's face again on earth.

CHAPTER XXIX.

CONCLUSION.

Nun will euch Hülfe bringen
Der gnadenreiche Tod.

It was again September, and the woods were touched here and there with red and gold, and there was a breath of autumn in the breeze.

Hardwicke had come down to Barham Towers, and brought Clare Welsman with him for a week's rest before starting for the Continent. Not to Paris this time—it was too full of painful reminiscences—but for a walking tour through the Black Forest.

“Jack,” said Sir Thomas, at breakfast, “I have been buying a new horse, and I do not know whether I am right or wrong. I wish you would see what you think of him this morning; he is in the loose box to the right.”

“I'll put him in the trap and drive him over to Seafeld; I want to go there to call

on Tom Banks, the parson's son; he used to be one of our fellows at the old place," said Hardwicke, who was discussing a large plateful of grouse pie, and was in unusually good spirits.

An hour later, as Clare was walking up and down the terrace in front of the house, smoking a cigarette, in company with Shock, a nondescript dog of Hardwicke's, which had taken a great fancy to him, Hardwicke drove round from the stable-yard, and pulled up in the middle of the drive.

"What do you think of the Dad's bargain?" he shouted to Clare, who crossed over the turf, and began critically examining the new horse.

It was a powerful bay, seventeen hands high, with a splendid show of bone and muscle, and a coat as silky as a lady's hair. As he stood, he fidgeted with his hind legs, and laid his ears impatiently.

"He's a good one to look at," said Clare, "but I have not seen him go yet; I should

fancy there was a strong trace of original sin in him."

"Who taught you anything about horse-flesh, young one?" said Hardwicke; "he's safe enough, take my word for it. Jump up, and see for yourself; it's a jolly drive to Seafield."

"Not I," said Clare; "if you will break your neck, don't ask me to break mine too. I believe that beast means murder; I can see it in his eye."

Hardwicke laughed. "I never knew such a cowardly fellow; I tell you your neck would be as safe here as on that terrace," and slackening the reins, he bowled away towards the town, and Clare leant against the portico, watching his progress, and playing with Shock's black ears.

Presently he went indoors and wrote some letters, and towards the middle of the day he strolled down into the town. He first watched the market people, and the farmers' wives and daughters bargaining for their

wares, for it was Barham market day, and when he was tired of this amusement, he went and looked sadly at Sir Richard Hardwicke's statue ; then he made his way up to the cliff, and walked up and down the esplanade. The sea was coming in crisply, and there was a pleasant breeze.

"I will wait here till Hardwicke comes back, and drive home with him," was his reflection, and he settled himself upon a seat which commanded a view of the Seafeld road.

He had not long to wait. In the distance he soon saw the high-stepping bay coming along in good style, in a trot of eight miles an hour. He was watching it lazily and admiringly, when he suddenly observed that its pace had quickened strangely ; then it broke from its trot into a swinging gallop.

Clare leapt from his seat with a pang at heart, for now they were near enough for him to see that Hardwicke was holding the bay in with all the strength of his great arms, and

leaning back on the seat. He could hear him speak to the horse and strive to soothe him, but he might as well have striven to soothe the sea. The brute had bolted, and the light gig was swaying from side to side as he tore along the stony road. Behind the esplanade was a broad green space of turf, then the road, and then a row of houses. As the horse flew by these, a child with a white frock came running down the garden in front of one of them. At sight of its dress, dazzling in the sunshine, he turned short off the road, dashed across the turf, and made straight for the cliff's edge. They were close to Clare now, and the horse was mad and blind with panic. There was but one thing to do, and that was to throw himself life in hand before it, and seize the reins. As it thundered down upon him, he flew at the horse's head, and grappled with him desperately. For a few yards, borne onward by the impetus of its flight, it dashed forward, carrying him before it; then it fell upon

him, hurling its driver on the turf. Hardwicke, unhurt, was on his legs in a moment, and unbuckling the straps of the harness with frantic haste. It seemed to him a space of years before he loosed the great beast, and freed Clare from his crushing weight. Meanwhile people were running across the turf from the houses near, and began to crowd round.

"A doctor, for God's sake," shouted Hardwicke, "and some water!"

But when he saw his friend's face he knew that neither could avail. Clare lay motionless and senseless, dying for his sake.

Old Shock, who had followed Clare down from the Towers, and was watching him with all his tender doggish heart in his eyes, and longing to help, began to lick the helpless hand that lay on the grass beside him.

"Clare, dear old boy, don't you know me?" faltered Hardwicke, with the tears running down his bearded face: it was the bitterest hour of his life.

For a brief moment the dying man's eyes opened, and he looked up at Hardwicke and smiled faintly; all that the man had been to him flashed through his failing mind; if Hardwicke was safe, it was sweet to die for him. Before the next wave broke on the sands below, Clare Welsman was out of reach of earthly pain and grief.

They brought down the bust which his own hand had carved, and raised it upon the spot where he fell; it was a fancy of Sir Thomas Hardwicke's, and he would hear of nothing else. And the sea rises and falls with its mournful symphony; the visitors pace up and down the esplanade, and the band plays on summer evenings; and in sunlight or starlight, in cloud or sunshine, the still marble face with the open brow and noble features looks wistfully out across the sea.

THE END.

